

Leviathan drawn out by its tail: The religious ideas of the second half of Leviathan

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Boston College

The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

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LEVIATHAN DRAWN OUT BY ITS TAIL: THE RELIGIOUS IDEAS OF THE
SECOND HALF OF LEVIATHAN

A Dissertation

By

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Leviathan Drawn Out by its Tail:
The Religious Ideas of the Second Half of Leviathan

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I examine the religious writings of Thomas Hobbes, primarily as they occur in the second half of *Leviathan* (but drawing from other sources as necessary). My aim is to illustrate the continuity between Hobbes' thoughts on religion and other areas of his philosophy, especially his political theory. Hobbes' distinctive philosophical position, filtered through the lens of the Bible, is what animates the theology of the second half of *Leviathan*. In short: Hobbes is a materialist, a determinist, an empiricist, a nominalist, a political absolutist, and a social and intellectual elitist. He came of age in an Anglican-Calvinist context and had a humanist education. He was born on the cusp of the scientific revolution, and considered himself a scientist and a mathematician. All of these influences affect the views presented in *Leviathan*. Hobbes approaches the Christianity of his era hypercritically, with an eye to excising foreign and irrational influences (Greek, Scholastic philosophy, pagan religion, Catholic hierarchy) and replacing them with (ostensibly) Biblically-grounded and philosophically-robust doctrines. In effect, Hobbes is attempting to rationally reconstruct Christianity on the basis of Scripture and his own philosophical system, and his overriding concern is with political stability and the absolute authority of the sovereign.

In Chapter 1, I focus on the first half of *Leviathan*. My discussion explores issues and controversies in the natural theology of Hobbes.

Chapter 2 draws some parallels between Hobbes' determinist physics and the doctrine of predestination most often associated with Jean Calvin.

Chapter 3 begins the analysis of the second half of *Leviathan*. I consider Hobbes' position on the relationship between reason and revelation. I consider the sources of religious belief from a Hobbesian perspective - miracles, prophecy, and scripture. Hobbes subjects all of these to rigorous epistemological critiques.

In Chapter 4, I examine Hobbes' unique account of eschatology, and the purposes to which he puts it. Hobbes' account of heaven and hell, the soul and salvation, are startling to the modern reader, but actually are an idiosyncratic blend of the radical ideas of some of Hobbes' contemporaries and his own philosophical commitments. I consider some of the potential sources for these innovations in his theory, whether direct or indirect.

Hobbes embraces a vision of the relationship between Church and State that emphasizes their unity and absolute subordination to the sovereign.

In Chapter 5, I analyze this extended argument, highlighting Hobbes' encyclopedic attempt to demolish any argument that splits authority into temporal and spiritual realms.

In Chapter 6 I consider the double question of Hobbes' religious sincerity: both as an individual and as the author of *Leviathan*. I consider the thoughts of the Straussian school as they apply to Hobbes. I return to the thoughts of Hobbes' contemporaries and what they believed that Hobbes was saying about religion. I compare Hobbes to Machiavelli on a major point of overlap.

To my Family

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*Leviathan drawn out by its tail: The religious ideas of the second half of Leviathan*¹

Jonathan Harmon

Introduction

Thomas Hobbes is a colorful figure who lived in exciting times and who profoundly influenced the shape of the modern polity. Hobbes today is well known as “the father of modern political philosophy”, but his views on religion are often overlooked or dismissed. Certainly, there is an outdated feel to Hobbes’ discussions of religion, which makes it easy to see them as distinct from and irrelevant to his wider project. Making sense of Hobbes’ place in the continuum of religious thought is difficult. Reading him apart from his contemporaries makes his religious arguments even more opaque and localized. Is there any profit to taking such arcane discussions seriously?

I believe there is, for several reasons. The first is that understanding what Hobbes thought about religion may help us understand other areas of his philosophy better. It will also lead us to better understand the depth and erudition of a thinker already acknowledged to be a giant.

I must confess that the strangeness of the times, its remoteness and its strange proximity, has its own intrinsic appeal.

More importantly, the early Modern period was an era torn apart by religious strife: the 30 Years’ War ended a mere 3 years before Hobbes wrote *Leviathan*, and religious conflict was at the heart of the English Civil War. Hobbes was at the center of a changing

¹ My title is an allusion to John Bramhall’s book, “The Catching of Leviathan” (1658) and Alexander Rosse’s “Leviathan drawn out with a hook” (1653). Samuel Mintz takes the title of his book, *The Hunting of Leviathan*, from similar considerations.

world, and his interventions in Christian doctrine must be understood against the backdrop of sectarian violence. His entire political philosophy can be seen as informed by the problem of religious diversity in the modern state. Hobbes is fairly unique in that he is an early Modern poised between the collapse of Catholic hegemony and the rise of the tolerationist solution of thinkers like John Locke. By still insisting on religious uniformity while facing the disintegration of old modes of social cohesion, Hobbes presents another solution to the problem of Modernity. While his alternative did not gain ascendancy, it offers a useful (and rigorous) contrast to Locke and others.² Reminding ourselves why the Moderns took the path they did, from the viewpoint of heirs to this tradition, is enlightening.

Finally, while many authors question the systematicity of the early Moderns, I believe reading *Leviathan's* meditations on religion to be illustrative of the audacity and the unity of Hobbes' thought. The parts and principles of that work cohere together, and when those principles are laid out and examined, one can see how this or that religious principle follows. In other words, we should not expect Hobbes's writings on religion to be divorced from the rest of his philosophy, from ontology to epistemology to political and moral theory.

Like many other great thinkers, Hobbes has a polarizing effect, especially when it comes to matters of religion. Scholars have asserted both Hobbes' religiosity and his atheism with equal vehemence, and with equal appeals to evidence.³ In the specific case of Hobbes, there seems to be little space for a middle ground: Hobbes either was or was not a sincere

² Hobbes finds himself in the company of Machiavelli and Rousseau (at least of the *Social Contract*) in this approach.

³ The reoccurrence of appeals to "obviousness" is equally common.

Christian; his writings either advocate for Christianity or they do not.⁴ Thinkers array themselves on both sides of this line.

This problem with reading Hobbes on religion can be neatly illustrated by the broad range of responses to a passage like the following:

For it is with the mysteries of our religion as with wholesome pills for the sick; which, swallowed whole, have the virtue to cure, but chewed, are for the most part cast up again without effect. (L.32.3/246)⁵

The typical modern reader sees the metaphor as crude, and the intention as straightforwardly sarcastic, implying a contempt for religion and “blind” faith. Hobbes provokes a knee-jerk feeling of atheism in the casual observer of the 20th century.

But it is important to note that there are rigorous and deliberate opponents to this view, both historical and contemporary. For instance, despite his frustrations with Hobbes in general, Clarendon reads this passage in a positive light, claiming that Hobbes was “modest and prudent” to write that “sober consideration” about the nature of faith, although he comments that Hobbes blatantly ignores it later on.⁶

A modern writer like Paul Johnson, after conceding the complexity of deciding the meaning of this passage, nonetheless concludes that when it is properly contextualized, “it can be clearly seen that his comparison of the mysteries for pills to the sick is not skeptical

⁴ The subject of Hobbes’ *Christianity*, not his theism, seems to me to be the decisive question.

⁵ I will refer to *Leviathan* by chapter and paragraph number, followed by the page in Edwin Curley’s edition. Curley’s edition offers several advantages, namely numbered paragraphs, modernized spelling, excellent footnotes and supporting materials, and the inclusion of passages from the Latin edition of 1668 where these diverge significantly from the English text. Other parenthetical abbreviations I will use throughout the dissertation will be EL for the *Elements of Law* (cited by Chapter, Paragraph, and page number in the Oxford edition), and DC for *De Cive* (Chapter, paragraph, page in the Cambridge edition).

⁶ Clarendon, Survey, 202. Clarendon, who detects irony in a great many places in Hobbes, either does not find it here, or thinks the phrasing, on its face, to be unobjectionable.

but is part and parcel of a doctrine of salvation and a theory of Christianity which formed the mainstream of Anglican development in the seventeenth century.”⁷

If we understood the early Moderns in the terms they used, the argument goes, we would see strong evidence for Hobbes’ religiosity. Such arguments teach a lesson. But while a historical sensibility is a necessity when trying to understand Hobbes’ thought, historical considerations can cut both ways. Many critics who argue for Hobbes’ sincerity do so on the basis of historical arguments. But an equal number of critics also point to a tradition of “writing between the lines” that educated readers understood, and whose commonplaces would have been familiar to a sophisticated audience. So the appeal to history to solve the question often gets us no further, and we still have argue our way about. My own interpretation of the passage reflects this.

Such diversity of reasonable, but contradictory, opinion makes for an interesting challenge. When treating Hobbes on religion, one must accept that in 350 years since the publication of *Leviathan*, there has been no smoking gun, no admission in a diary or private letter that is conclusive.⁸ One must live with ambiguity, while marshalling evidence as best as one can.

My goal in this dissertation was to examine Hobbes’ religious ideas, primarily as presented in the second half of *Leviathan*, both in detail and in their entirety, looking for the principles and purposes that might stand behind them.

⁷ Johnson, Paul, “Hobbes’s Anglican Doctrine of Salvation”, pg. 104.

⁸ This is not out of the question. Several texts by Hobbes have appeared I recent years that were previously unknown or thought lost – Hobbes’ brief on the law of heresy, for one, or his critique of Thomas Whites’ *De Mundo*.

First, I have focused on *Leviathan* for several reasons. It is Hobbes' third and final statement of his political theory, and arguably his most mature and developed. In tone, it is his most radical and unapologetic work.⁹ It is also his longest and most complete account of political theory and revealed religion. *Leviathan* includes fuller discussions of many issues only briefly mentioned in the *Elements of Law* or *De Cive*, and it also contains many passages that have no equivalent in those earlier works. Hobbes also seems to have changed his opinions on important matters like ecclesiology and the sacraments in the transition from *De Cive* to *Leviathan*, moving from more orthodox Anglican views to a vision of Christianity that was difficult to classify (or accept). The religious chapters of *Leviathan*, on their own, rival the size of the whole of the *Elements* or *De Cive*! There is simply more to work with, and that material is simply more interesting.¹⁰

Historically, *Leviathan* is Hobbes' most famous work. While *De Cive* was perhaps more influential in Hobbes' lifetime, *Leviathan* is the work to which all modern students of Hobbes turn to first. *Leviathan* was certainly more controversial than *De Cive*: many of Hobbes' royalist associates praised the latter and despised the former. Without a doubt, it earned him a reputation as a troublemaker, even an "atheist".¹¹

Leviathan is also the occasion of a profound shift in rhetorical style, and in its expected audience. The *Elements* were not published by Hobbes, but merely circulated

⁹ Although, to be fair, the Latin version of 1668 does include appendices which attempt to explain or even modify some of Hobbes' more controversial opinions. The Latin edition also tones down some of Hobbes' more excessive humor and sarcasm, intended as it was for a more educated class of reader. See Skinner, Quentin, *Reason & Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes*.

¹⁰ This will not prevent me from pointing out the contrasts when they prove relevant. On almost all counts, however, *Leviathan* marks a step forward in the development of the ideas, and moves them toward something distinctly Hobbesian.

¹¹ "Atheist" was a general term of abuse in 17th century England, with meanings running the full range from "denier of the existence of the Christian God" to simply "immoral".

among friends and colleagues.¹² *De Cive* appeared in Latin, the language of the upper, educated classes. Both of these works are written in a lively, but sober tone. *Leviathan* first appeared in English, allowing it to be accessible to a far larger population than a Latin edition would be. While rigorously argued, Hobbes also indulges in (sometimes crass) humor and other literary tropes. The fact that the title of the book is a metaphor is no small departure from the style of the earlier two works. This change in style and audience has important consequences for how we can read the book.

Leviathan is both a work about politics and a political act. It represents Hobbes' political ideal of absolute sovereignty, but it is also his attempt to bring that ideal into being. Hobbes expressed hoped that "this writing of mine may fall into the hands of a sovereign...and by the exercise of entire sovereignty in protecting public teaching of it, convert this truth of speculation into the utility of practice." (L31.41/243–4). He hopes that the work "may be profitably printed, and more profitably taught in the Universities" as a textbook (L.R&C.16/496). But aside from kings and dons, Hobbes also sought to widely influence public opinion, at least amongst the educated classes.¹³

I believe these considerations illustrate why *Leviathan* richly deserves the special attention scholars give it, and why I should focus on it now.

Leviathan can be meaningfully divided in half. Books I and II form the first half, concerned with matters properly considered philosophical, and using reason and experience as guides. The second half, consisting of Books III and IV, considers revealed religion.¹⁴ One

¹² Editions were published without Hobbes' consent in his lifetime.

¹³ These in turn will influence the uneducated masses.

¹⁴ For more on this tripartite division of knowledge into experience, reason, and faith, see JGA Pocock's excellent study, "Time, History, and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes".

must understand the first half to grasp the second, as the philosophical principles and political priorities of the first half decisively impact the shape of the second half. I will touch upon the theological elements of the first half, but my focus is on the revealed theology of the second half.

Hobbes' distinctive philosophical position, filtered through the lens of the Bible, is what animates the theology of the second half. In short: Hobbes is a materialist, a determinist, an empiricist, a nominalist, a political absolutist, and a social and intellectual elitist. He came of age in a Anglican–Calvinist context and had a humanist education. He was born on the cusp of the scientific revolution, and considered himself a scientist and a mathematician. All of these influences affect the views presented in *Leviathan*. Hobbes approaches the Christianity of his era hypercritically, with an eye to excising foreign and irrational influences (Greek, Scholastic philosophy, pagan religion, Catholic hierarchy) and replacing them with (ostensibly) Biblically-grounded and philosophically-robust doctrines. In effect, Hobbes is attempting to rationally reconstruct Christianity on the basis of Scripture and his own philosophical system.¹⁵

Hobbes will reject any account of spirit that does not result in a materialist explanation, for instance. He will interpret all mentions of spirit as corporeal or as epistemological errors. Even God himself will not escape this rampant materiality. The clash between materialism and traditional Christian views will be one of many battles that Hobbes fought to present his vision.

¹⁵ I share this sentiment with a number of other students of Hobbes. Perhaps most influential for me in this respect is SA Lloyd's discussion in *Ideals as Interests in Hobbes's Leviathan*.

But the overriding concern of Hobbes' masterpiece is politics. Specifically, Hobbes' utmost concern in his religious doctrines seems to be the political implications of those ideas. Hobbes' greatest motivation is the distrust of private judgment to the benefit of the sovereign power.¹⁶ In general, he doubts that private judgment has intellectual integrity, and he denies that a society can be organized in such a way as to give private individuals the power to rule. In each case the "public reason" of the sovereign has priority over private judgment (and passion), and subordinates it absolutely.¹⁷

I intend to show that every doctrine of consequence in Hobbes' religious writings in *Leviathan* serves to strengthen the power of the sovereign. Religious doctrines are not haphazardly arranged, but tend to a single overarching purpose – stability.

In Chapter 1, I focus on the first half of *Leviathan*. The first half deals with the use of reason and experience to provide us with knowledge. Consequently, my discussion explores issues and controversies in the natural theology of Hobbes. Natural theology, Hobbes tells us, has little to say about matters of religion, and much of that concerns what we *cannot* legitimately say. Hence, Hobbes neither develops natural theology very far, nor does he feel the need to do so. Revelation is far more important to him, as we shall see.

¹⁶ Private judgment is any judgment not vested with sovereign authority, whether individual or corporate.

¹⁷ This is a deliberate allusion to John Rawls in *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, who writes, "In each case the reasonable has priority over the rational, and subordinates it absolutely" (82). Hobbes uses the term "public reason" in a much different context at L37.13/300, but his formulation is similar. SA Lloyd, whose interpretation of Hobbes in *Ideals as Interests in Hobbes's Leviathan*, takes a Rawlsian approach to understanding Hobbes' views on religions, arguing it was reasonable for him (in the technical Rawlsian sense) to argue for religious uniformity as opposed to toleration, given his background culture. See 274–278 of that work. I am very interested in Lloyd's approach, and I take great interest in her thesis that Hobbes would rather rationalize Christianity than try to reject it, although she and I disagree about Hobbes' sincerity. "Private judgment" as Hobbes' chief adversary is Lloyd's formulation.

Before launching into Hobbes' analysis of revealed religion, Chapter 2 draws some parallels between Hobbes' determinist physics and the doctrine of predestination most often associated with Jean Calvin. Because Hobbes' account dovetails so nicely with that of the Reformers, I conclude that Hobbes was aware of this overlap and possibly strengthened his physical theory with theological insights. While this does not necessarily mean that Hobbes would identify as a "Calvinist", it does illustrate his willingness to draw on intellectually sound theological insights into his philosophical project. Using this method, Hobbes often yields conclusions his more pious sources would not have accepted.

After these prefatory discussions, Chapter 3 begins the analysis of the second half of *Leviathan*. I consider Hobbes' position on the relationship between reason and revelation. I consider the sources of religious belief from a Hobbesian perspective – miracles, prophecy, and scripture. Hobbes subjects all of these to rigorous, and one might read: fatal, epistemological critiques. I conclude by considering Hobbes' ideas on freedom of thought, and ask whether he might have been closer to the modern idea of toleration than previously thought.

In Chapter 4, I examine Hobbes' unique account of eschatology, and the purposes to which he puts it. Hobbes' account of heaven and hell, the soul and salvation, are startling to the modern reader, but actually are a idiosyncratic blend of the radical ideas of some of Hobbes' contemporaries and his own philosophical commitments. Hobbes' eschatological vision has precise theological targets and distinct political ramifications. Hobbes exposed himself to ruthless criticism for these ideas, knowing full well they were controversial – an act which testifies to the importance of this eschatological vision to his theory. Hobbes had

never written material like this before. I consider some of the potential sources for these innovations in his theory, whether direct or indirect. I also consider Hobbes' minimalist criteria for salvation, and how this fits into his larger political project.

Unsurprisingly, Hobbes embraces a vision of the relationship between Church and State that emphasizes their unity and absolute subordination to the sovereign. In Chapter 5, I analyze this extended argument, highlighting Hobbes' encyclopedic attempt to demolish any argument that splits authority into temporal and spiritual realms. Hobbes' rhetorical powers reach an all-time high in his attack here. As with his eschatology, much of this material has no precedent in Hobbes' corpus. Hobbes emphasizes the centrality of the sovereign in all aspects of religion.

In light of the accumulated evidence, in Chapter 6 I consider the double question of Hobbes' religious sincerity: both as an individual and as the author of *Leviathan*. While our answer to the first question must be circumspect, the answer to the second is clearer. I consider the thoughts of the Straussian school as they apply to Hobbes. I return to the thoughts of Hobbes' contemporaries and what they believed that Hobbes was saying about religion. I compare Hobbes to Machiavelli on a major point of overlap.

Chapter 1: Hobbes on Natural Theology

Theologians often make a distinction between natural theology and revealed theology. Natural theology consists of what we can know (or feel justified in believing) about God on the basis of unaided human reason. Theoretically, because human beings are supposed to be largely similar, these beliefs of natural theology should be accessible to all. Natural theology is limited, however, in that it depends on abstract reasoning by fallible human beings situated in a particular culture. Its conclusions are necessarily modest, and traditionally they are considered incomplete.¹⁸

Theologians who could be considered influential for those in Hobbes' time ran a narrow range of opinions. Thomas Aquinas is cautious: "the truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors."¹⁹ Jean Calvin is less sanguine about the power of unaided reason, writing "it appears that if men were taught only by nature, they would hold to nothing certain or solid or clear-cut, but would be so tied to confused principles so as to worship an unknown God."²⁰ Martin Luther argues also an extreme position: "The whole world, human reason itself...is obliged to confess that it never knew Christ nor heard of him before the gospel came into the world...It must therefore confess, willy-nilly, that by its own powers it

¹⁸ Some theologians even go so far as to deny that natural reason has any place in justifying belief in God; this position is called *fideism*.

¹⁹ Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, Question I, Article I. (The translation is from Peter Kreeft, ed. *Summa of the Summa*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990. p. 36–37)

²⁰ Calvin, Jean. *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book I*. Ch V, §12. The edition I have consulted is ed. John T. McNeill, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960. Vol. 1, pg. 66.

has been unable either to know or to seek after the things that pertain to the way, the truth, and salvation.”²¹

By contrast, revealed religion is based on divine revelation, primarily through the Scriptures. According to the tradition, revealed religion is superior to natural theology in many ways. First, because many important truths “exceed human reason”²² and could not be known otherwise. Second, revealed religion can eliminate the human error identified above. It can corroborate astute philosophical reasoning, while supplementing its details, all the while making it accessible to more than just a few specialists. Rational theologians, like Aquinas, argue that the truths of revealed religion may not be apparent to reason, but these truths never contradict reason either.

Natural theology relies exclusively on (finite) human reason. Revealed theology employs both reason and faith. Faith picks up where reason leaves off. Again, to use the traditional authority on these matters, Aquinas’ way of putting this is as follows: “Although those things which are beyond man’s knowledge may not be sought for by man through his reason, nevertheless, once they are revealed by God they must be accepted by faith.”²³ Reason does, however, continue to play a role even with regard to those articles of faith, by organizing and interpreting these dogmas. Revealed theology is still *theo-logy*.

Thomas Hobbes employs this traditional distinction between natural and revealed theology (and between reason and faith) in the composition and in the organization of many of his writings. Consequently, my discussion of Hobbes’ work on religion will have two basic

²¹ Luther, Martin. *The Bondage of the Will*, part VI. In *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*. Edited by Timothy F. Lull. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989. p. 212. Luther’s position is the most fideist of the three above. Calvin, however, is closer in spirit than the citation given would suggest.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 37

parts, considering each of these two basic aspects of theology in turn. This of course parallels Hobbes' own analytic framework in his political writings. In *Leviathan*, to give our leading example, the first two Parts ("Of Man" and "Of Commonwealth") correspond to reason (and include the discussions of natural theology), while the latter two Parts ("Of a Christian Commonwealth" and "Of the Kingdom of Darkness") address matters of faith and revealed religion. Along the way, we can see how Hobbes highlights the tension between these two modes of belief. We can ask whether he was a thoroughgoing rationalist who rejects faith altogether or if he was a kind of fideist, holding faith and reason in distinct domains.

Natural Theology

There are two aspects of Hobbes' natural theology to consider: (1) the natural bases for *belief* and (2) the natural modes of *worship*. With regard to the former, we must distinguish arguments for (1.1) God's (bare) existence from (1.2) discussions about the nature and attributes of God. All in all, Hobbes seems confident that God's existence is amenable to rational proof (although there are passages that seem to dispute this). However, he is much more skeptical about how much we can meaningfully say about the divine nature. Beyond a few vague assertions, all we are entitled to say can be reduced to metaphor, hyperbole, and honorifics.

1. Belief

A first problem for the reader of Hobbes and religion becomes apparent almost immediately. Hobbes describes ordinary religious ideas in extraordinary ways. For instance,

Chapter 6 of *Leviathan* contains the following curious passage amongst a discussion of the passions:

Fear of powers invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publicly allowed, RELIGION; not allowed, SUPERSTITION. And when the power imagined is truly such as we imagine, TRUE RELIGION. (L6.35/31)

Clarendon pointed out this definition in his *Survey*, indicating that “men will probably with the more impatience and curiosity, tho with the less reverence” turn to Hobbes’ discussion of religion in the third part of *Leviathan* after reading it.²⁴

This definition was so bizarre that Hobbes felt compelled to defend it (albeit weakly) in the Appendix to the Latin *Leviathan* of 1668 as not entailing atheism or religious skepticism.²⁵ Many modern critics also take this to be evidence of Hobbes’ irreligion, because of the use of the words “feigned” and “imagined”²⁶, as well as the use of the word “fear” to describe the same emotion in religion and superstition. There are defenders of the innocence of the definition as well. For instance, Willis Glover observes,

Fear...was not a term of opprobrium for Hobbes. Unblessed by the easy optimism of the Enlightenment, he saw the fear of God as the beginning of wisdom, and the fear of each other as the motive behind the formation of the state.²⁷

I think this ambiguity of the definition was intentional on Hobbes’ part. In my mind, Hobbes even seems to be playing upon the perfectly pious “fear of the Lord” by equating it with superstition and phantasms.

More troubling to readers (both modern and contemporaneous) in this passage is the dependence of “Religion” on public authority. Curley notes, “it surely does not bespeak

²⁴ Clarendon, *Survey*, pg. 21.

²⁵ See the discussion on 542. Hobbes’ response is almost a non sequitur. He does refer to Ecclesiastes as saying “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”.

²⁶ See Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan*, pgs. 50–53.

²⁷ Glover, “God and Thomas Hobbes”, pg. 162.

much genuine religiosity to suggest that the distinction between religion and superstition depends on whether the state has authorized the tales causing that fear.”²⁸

While this is indeed a feature of Hobbes’ political philosophy that only the sovereign can declare what is allowable in terms of religion, this definition seems to make what counts as “religion” depend on potentially arbitrary fiat. Furthermore, Hobbes seems to leave himself open to a charge that a disallowed “superstition” may nevertheless be a “true imagination” and yet not count as “true religion.”—in other words, objectively true and politically disallowed. In any case, Hobbes uses the word “religion” in wider ways than compassed by this passage in other parts of *Leviathan*, so the definition here seems to be incomplete. Throughout the chapter on the passions, Hobbes seems to be exercising his wit to create pithy, sardonic definitions. (That dark humor fills *Leviathan*, making any answer difficult to find among the thorns).

It is worth noting that this definition occurs in the discussion of the passions in general, and that specifically it follows immediately after the definition for “Curiosity”, which is: “a lust of the mind by that perseverance of delight in the continual and indefatigable generation of *knowledge* exceedeth the short vehemence of any carnal pleasure” (L6.35/31, emphasis mine). The implication seems to be that religious belief has a logical or topical connection with properly *scientific* curiosity as well as superstitious reasoning, and we shall see how both kinds of curiosity affect Hobbes’ view of religion.

We can see condensed in this passage several of the pitfalls that confront the interpreter of Hobbes. While Hobbes often writes in English, he frequently uses terms in a different sense than a modern reader, often relying on translated technical terms from Latin

²⁸ Curley, “I durst not write so boldly”, pg. 524.

or implicitly using a theoretical model of the universe now considered outdated. If we are insufficiently attentive to this difficulty, we can miss (or even *reverse*) Hobbes' point. Furthermore, Hobbes is a talented prose stylist, not averse to using rhetoric in his writing (especially in *Leviathan*). Phrases can be used for emotional effect as much as for rigorous argumentation. A rhetorical flourish often leaps out from a passage disconnected from Hobbes' main argument on the subject, confusing the reader as to whether it should be given weight. Overall, it can be difficult to tell which passages deserve emphasis. It is one of my guiding beliefs that these asides are not throwaway passages that Hobbes later regretted or which swerved from his purpose. I believe they are windows into his intentions. I think they reveal, at times, a purely instrumental view toward religion.

We should also consider what Hobbes means by "belief" and "faith", as opposed to "knowledge" or "science". Science is a "knowledge of all the consequences of names appertaining to the subject at hand" (L5.17/25). If we do not start from settled definitions we possess only opinion. If a person's opinion

beginneth at some saying of another, of whose ability to know the truth and of whose honesty in not deceiving he doubteth not, and then the discourse is not so much concerning the thing as the person, and the resolution is called BELIEF and FAITH; *faith in* the man; *belief*, both *of* the man, and *of* the truth of what he says. So that in belief are two opinions, one of the saying of the man, the other of his virtue. (L7.5/36).

Hobbes is referring to all kinds of faith here, but he clearly has religion in mind. He draws the startling conclusion that "it is evident that whatsoever we believe upon no other reason than is drawn from authority of men only and their writings, whether they be sent from God or not, is faith in men only." (L7.7/37). This kind of thinking, while not as important for a discussion of natural religion, is vitally important when we come to the discussion of sacred texts and prophecy later on. it has the profound effect of shifting all

second-hand discussions of truth to the hands of authorities – men who unlike other men, are given the full measure of the state’s trust.

Hobbes has little confidence in arguments from authority. He criticizes those who rely too heavily on the opinions of others. Hobbes argues that “those men that take their instruction from the authority of books, and not from their own meditation,” are “as much below the condition of ignorant men as men endued with true science are above it.” (L4.13/19). He quips, “words are wise men’s counters, they do but reckon by them; but they are the money of fools, that value them by the word of an *Aristotle*, a *Cicero*, or a *Thomas*, or any other doctor whatsoever, if but a man.” (ibid.) One might be lead to believe that other important books might also be less than credible authorities as well.

So we have reason to supposes that Hobbes finds fallible human causes for most if not all beliefs, fallible both cognitively and morally. That he does not seem to value faith very highly from the perspective of knowledge.

With these cautions made, we can now turn to a discussion of the “seeds of religion” and discussion of the grounds for belief in God.

1.1 God’s Existence

In *Leviathan*, there are two ways that human beings come to have beliefs in the existence of God, corresponding to passion and reason, respectively. According to Hobbes, “reason is not, as sense and memory, born with us, nor gotten by experience only, as prudence is, but attained by industry” (L5.17/25). We must work hard to work from proper definitions and construct logical connections between using a rigorous method. This is not a natural gift of humankind. The average person is ruled by their passions and experiences.

Nevertheless, religion is peculiar to the human animal. Hence, in addition to a rational basis for believing in God, there must also be a psychological one as well. This basis must be sufficiently powerful to account for the overwhelming evidence of primitive religious belief of some kind on the one hand; it must also be sufficiently vague to allow for the incredible diversity of superstitions on the other. The psychological seeds of religious belief must also be defective in some way, because the rational argument serves as a corrective to irrational belief.

Hobbes gives us a psychological argument for belief in the supernatural in four steps:

1. Humans are naturally “inquisitive” as to the cause of events, but especially so with regard to “their own good and evil fortune” (L12.2/63).
2. Humans naturally suppose all effects have some cause; all things being equal, humans will suppose the cause to be directly at hand or immediate.
3. Many true causes evade the typical human being’s perception, “and when he cannot assure himself of the true causes of things (for the causes of good and evil fortune for the most part are invisible) he supposes causes of them, either such as his own fancy suggesteth, or trusteth to the authority of other men, such as he thinks to be his friends, and wiser than himself.” (L12.4/63)
4. “The two first, make anxiety” says Hobbes (L12.5/63). Anxiety is a species of fear. And thus, “This perpetual fear, always accompanying mankind in the ignorance of causes (as it were in the dark), must needs have for object something. And therefore, when there is nothing to be seen, there is nothing to accuse, either of their good or evil fortune, but some *power* or *agent* invisible” (L12.6/64). The imaginative power of the human mind creates supernatural causes for everyday mysteries and imbues them with strange powers.

This is the most basic source of our ideas of the existence of supernatural forces. We can call this Hobbes' "pathological theology", with deliberate ambiguity.

The following four observations give us a picture of the *nature* of "powers invisible" via this pre-rational method:

1. Specious thinking often leads humans to act as if "invisible" meant "incorporeal." By making this leap, humans concoct a spirit world alongside our own, teeming with magical forces and ghosts.
2. Hobbes notes that "...men that know not what it is that we call *causing* (that is, almost all men) have no other rule to guess by but by observing and remembering what they have seen to precede the like effect at some other time, without seeing between the antecedent and subsequence event any dependence or connection at all; and hope for good or evil luck superstitiously, from things that have no part at all in the causing of it" (L12.8/65). Arbitrary connections are made between unrelated phenomena and a host of irrational superstitions arises. These forces are not traced back to a unified, central power, but are considered to be numerous and diffuse. So much so that "there is almost nothing that has a name that has not been esteemed amongst the Gentiles" (L12.13/67).
3. Worship towards these invisible entities takes the form of respect that humans accord one another. These invisible forces are subject to anthropomorphization. The powers are assumed to be like humans and are expected to act in a human way. They can be bribed, swayed by emotion, get angry, etc.
4. Incidental happenings are seen as predictions for the future ("prognostics"). They are interpreted as real *causes*.

“And in these four things...” writes Hobbes, “consisteth the natural seed of *religion*” (L12.11/66–67), the basis for all prescientific religion. Of these features, none resemble the components of a rational theology. They are unsystematic, polytheistic, and emotional.

The end result of human passions is therefore a crude and primitive fear of “powers invisible”, an unflattering picture of absurd superstitions. These outlandish beliefs form the backbone of pagan religion. A great portion of Chapter xii is devoted to a seemingly endless catalog of the absurdities of pagan belief—“there is almost nothing that has a name that has not been esteemed among the Gentiles” (L12.13/67). The critique of pagan religion also has strong rhetorical ties to the “ghostly” practices of the Catholic Church, first and foremost, as well as other Christian sects.

Despite the roughness of this “theology”, it seems to be the form of religion most *natural* to human beings, and the most common to find. Thus, it is worth stressing that the religious impulse, the belief in higher powers, is impossible to get around. These notions, “can never be so abolished out of human nature, but that new religions may again be made to spring out of them by the culture of such men as for such purpose are in reputation.” (L12.23/71). Such belief arises spontaneously and universally as the result of the natural action of our intellect, and so people recognize that this can be exploited. *People will be apt to believe accounts of the supernatural that sound like this.*

While uncritical minds will naturally conjure up (or accept tales of) an array of invisible powers, the more scientifically-minded will discover the existence of God by another route.

It does seem likely that both grounds for belief could inhere in the same person, thereby overdetermining a belief in God. A more invidious consequence of this

“collaboration” is the risk of contaminating rational theology with the disordered mess of superstition. To Hobbes, many of the things he found objectionable in the Catholic Church can be traced to this kind of contamination.

In any case, a straightforward reading of Hobbes will suggest that religion is a necessary part of human life. Yet, Hobbes did not intend his pathological explanation to be an actual proof for God’s existence. But while it is not strictly rational, it does have some rationality to it. After all, it is the pursuit of a chain of causes, however superficially conducted. It does support a conclusion (i.e., the existence of powerful divine forces) that Hobbes considers warranted and *useful*. We can rationalize our pursuit of causes into a scientific method, building on our natural curiosity to develop a sound theory. Furthermore, this religious impulse can be exploited by a sovereign, believer or otherwise. While it poses a risk, the religious impulse needs to be embraced by the state as a tool of organization and control (more on this later). The political scientist simply cannot get around it.

The crudeness of the psychological model, then, is contrasted with the elegance and rigor of the scientific-rational bases for belief in the existence of God. (But it must also be said that the fullness and richness of the pathological view also contrasts with the empty formality of the rational view). Hobbes’ discussion of rational proof splits up into the two aspects we have already highlighted in his psychological theory—grounds for belief, and an account of the divine nature. I will address the divine nature in the next section.

Traditionally, three main arguments for the existence of God have been made—(1) the cosmological (or “first mover”) argument, (2) the teleological argument (also called the argument from design), and (3) the ontological argument. The first two are *a posteriori*, reasoning from facts of experience (the chain of causes and the order of nature, respectively)

backward to the existence of God. The latter is *a priori*, arguing from the concept of God to his existence.

In his article, “Hobbes’s Grounds for Belief in a Deity,” KC Brown makes the case that Hobbes employs both of the *a posteriori* proofs.²⁹ Following Brown’s lead, Ronald Hepburn cites texts that support the presence of *all three* of these proofs.³⁰ While these two authors agree in substance on many of these issues, there is a degree of controversy about which argument is central to Hobbes’ account.

Even the casual reader will discover several versions of the cosmological proof (1) in *Leviathan*. By contrast with the pre-scientific model,

...the acknowledging of one God, eternal, infinite, and omnipotent, may more easily be derived from the desire men have to know the causes of natural bodies, and their several virtues and operations, than from the fear of what was to befall them in time to come. (L12.6/64)

This is a straightforward, rather unvarnished version of this proof, common among Scholastics and ultimately derived from Aristotle.³¹ It is the most amenable rational proof to our native inquisitiveness. The proof demonstrates the existence of a supreme being, albeit one still remote from the personal, Christian God.

Critics have noted that Hobbes does not seem to have felt it necessary to provide more than this basic sketch of the cosmological proof. Sommerville writes, “Hobbes’ use of the [cosmological] argument was notable only for its lack of rigour.”³² The proof as-is does not specify whether the “first cause” is a temporal one (the beginning of time; a “first

²⁹ Brown, KC. “Hobbes’s grounds for belief in a deity”. *Philosophy* 37 (1962). 336–34.

³⁰ Hepburn, Ronald. “Hobbes on the knowledge of God.” In *Hobbes and Rousseau: A collection of critical essays*, ed. Maurice Cranston and Richard S. Peters. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972. 85–108.

³¹ In fact, Hobbes notes in the OL that this was obvious to the “sounder ancient philosophers” (64n2). This, as Curley notes, is a rare gesture of approval toward Ancient philosophy, specifically Aristotle.

³² Sommerville, *Thomas Hobbes: Political ideas in historical context*, pg. 138.

mover”) or whether it is a question of priority in terms of simultaneous causes. The latter is traditionally the more philosophically defensible, but the former does harmonize with the Christian account of *Genesis* and the Creation story.³³ A passage in the Latin *Leviathan* suggests Hobbes might have gestured to the more sophisticated account normally deployed by the Schoolmen.³⁴ But in general, Hobbes does not seem to have felt that anything deeper was required.

Brown argues that the cosmological argument as presented is defective, and not just incomplete. He offers a passage in *De Corpore* where Hobbes seems to say exactly that. Hobbes argues that since we cannot realistically trace a chain of causes backward in time to their real beginning, what we end up doing is *assuming* that there is a first cause on the basis of our inquiry. This assumption is not a “demonstration” and it cannot be said to be invulnerable to skepticism thereby. Brown then takes this argument one step further.

In a move that rebuffs conventional wisdom, Brown argues that despite the textual prominence of the cosmological proof, it is, in fact, subordinated to the teleological proof (2). Brown claims that Hobbes’ use of the word “cause” was ambiguous to *him*, but is not for contemporary readers. To Hobbes cause can be used in such a way as to have “no necessary connection with antecedent motion, or with temporal antecedence at all,”³⁵ and to refer to a teleological ordering, whereas the modern reader nearly always makes the connection to temporal causation. This ambiguity, and Hobbes’ reluctance to deemphasize the apparent “geometric” straightforwardness of the cosmological argument conceals the logical priority of the teleological argument in his work. Brown provides three passages to support his claim

³³ See for instance, Martinich’s discussion in the *Two Gods of Leviathan*, 192–195.

³⁴ See Curley, 62, n. 4, where the notion of eternal, i.e. non-temporal, cause is used.

³⁵ Brown, p. 341.

that the teleological argument is (a) present in Hobbes and (b) conceptually more important than the cosmological argument. The passage from *Leviathan* reads: “by the visible things of this world *and their admirable order*, a man may conceive there is a cause of them, which men call God” (L11.25/62, italics inserted). The other two passages make similar claims.³⁶

Brown concludes, “There seems, in fact, no reason why the Argument from Design should be denied its proper place in Hobbes’s system.”³⁷ That is, at the center of Hobbes’ proof strategy.

But where Brown places the argument from design at the head of the class, Hepburn almost dismisses it as “brief, naively presented, and in no way defended against possible objections.”³⁸ Referring to the passage Brown uses from *Leviathan* above (L11.25/62), he argues that, “it is hard to see Hobbes as giving any priority to the teleological aspect, since many more words, earlier in the same paragraph, are given to the argument from the regress of causal dependence.”³⁹ Hepburn falls back to the standard position that the cosmological argument is central. All things considered, I am tempted to agree with him. Brown’s evidence is not ironclad; the most it does is to show that teleological concerns have a place in Hobbes, which Hepburn would not dispute. Certainly, Hobbes’ repetition of the cosmological argument does give it a kind of priority in his system.

There are even grounds in the text for us to consider the ontological argument (3) as a strategy for rational proof employed by Hobbes. Hepburn observes that when Hobbes, “includes existence among the divine attributes,” this “carries Hobbes at least to the borders

³⁶ Brown, p. 342

³⁷ Brown, p. 343.

³⁸ Hepburn, p. 92

³⁹ Hepburn, p. 91.

of the Ontological Argument.”⁴⁰ He provides the following passage in *Leviathan* to support this claim: “first, it is manifest, we ought to attribute to him *existence*. For no man can have the will to honor that which he thinks not to have any being” (L31.14/239). But if Brown overestimated the teleology in Hobbes, Hepburn makes a symmetrical mistake here. If a charitable reader will admit that there is an ontological proof lurking behind the scenes, it is indubitably the case this is the least developed of the three arguments, and it seems to do the least work for Hobbes. Even Hepburn is forced to admit that Hobbes “hesitates” from giving a full-blown version of this proof. I include it for the purposes of completeness and not with any great conviction. Moreover, the passage in question is a practical discussion of natural worship, that is behavior toward God, not speculative theology. It is even a little humorous. Hobbes certainly knew the theology well enough to allude to the ontological argument, but that shouldn’t surprise us. Whether he was actually *using* it, is doubtful.

The same textual confidence with regard to a rational proof (and the same terseness of presentation) is found in abbreviated form both in Chapter xi of the *Elements* and Chapter xv of *De Cive*. The latter declares succinctly: “God’s existence can be known by natural reason”.⁴¹ *Elements* provides its own sketch of a cosmological proof.⁴²

Yet despite their repeat appearance in the political works, none of these proofs are novel nor articulated expertly. Nevertheless, “Hobbes constructed his philosophy of religion out of a theological materials that had a thoroughly respectable, indeed distinguished history.”⁴³ Therefore, what Hobbes says about proving the existence of God was

⁴⁰ Hepburn, p. 90.

⁴¹ *De Cive*, p. 164.

⁴² *Elements*, xi, p. 64–65

⁴³ Hepburn, p. 87.

conventional enough to omit a complete, rigorous demonstration. In the final analysis, none of Hobbes' proofs are sufficient to move the reader by themselves to believe there is a God, not should we assume they were intended that way. They are outlines or placeholders at best, referring the reader to more robust statements in the tradition. If Hobbes had any great personal interest in the proofs, he does not show it. Either he thinks the arguments too well-trod, or perhaps he is just half-hearted about the whole project.

The minor quibbles between the texts we have looked at so far give way to a deeper problem amongst interpreters. The account of the straightforward availability of a proof (or proofs) for God's existence is directly challenged by a manuscript finally published in 1973. Since the MS had no title, that supplied by its English editors is *Thomas White's "De Mundo" Examined*.⁴⁴ This is a Latin work, undisputedly written by Hobbes, which was lost for centuries. It is a *bona fide* instance of that shocking discovery just waiting to be found in an archive. Hobbes gave apparently gave it to his friend Pierre Gassendi to edit, and they both promptly forgot about it. The book is a detailed, but incomplete, criticism of a work by Hobbes' acquaintance, the Jesuit Thomas White, who was an Aristotelian of sorts. This work is commonly referred to in the secondary literature as *Anti-White*. I will stick to this practice, as it sums up Hobbes' intentions more succinctly than the alternative.

Aside from its bizarre publishing history, what is remarkable is that in *Anti-White*, which was written in 1643 (a year after *De Cive* was published, and probably being drafted at the same time), Hobbes seems to adopt a full-blown "fideist" approach to the question of God's existence, claiming that natural reason/philosophy and the truths of religion cannot

⁴⁴ Hobbes, Thomas. *Thomas White's De Mundo Examined*. Trans. Harold Whitmore Jones. London: Bradford University Press, 1976.

be reconciled.⁴⁵ Some truths exist outside the power of our reason to fathom, yet we should accept them wholeheartedly and uncritically. Fideism in its strongest form rejects any sort of natural theology. There are more moderate forms that embrace a severely constrained natural theology along with an account of “mysteries” beyond human understanding. Some things must be taken on faith alone. As we have seen Calvin, Luther, and Aquinas all seem to fall into this camp.

There are certainly passages in *Leviathan* that have a fideist slant.

For instance, discussing the miracles of the bible, Hobbes writes:

When anything therein written is too hard for our examination, we are bidden to captivate our understanding to the words, and not to labor in sifting out a philosophical truth by logic, of such mysteries as are incomprehensible, nor fall under any rule of natural science. (I.32.3/246).

These are allusions to weak fideism, and they do not entirely reject the power of reason to discern some truths about God, especially his *existence*. They specifically occur in the context not of natural theology, but in the sphere of revealed religion. Hepburn, writing well before the publication of *Anti-White*, saw fit to observe, “Serious though fideism is as a theological approach, Hobbes himself cannot be said to have made strenuous efforts to ground and justify his version of it, far less to have succeeded.”⁴⁶

Chapter 26 of *Anti-White* (dealing with *De Mundo*’s argument for the existence of God) contains several statements that caution the would-be philosopher to abstain from scrutinizing religious truths, going so far as to suggest that since these philosophical attempts

⁴⁵ For a discussion of 17th Century fideism as it relates to Hobbes, see Richard Tuck, *Hobbes*, 80–84. Tuck cites Hobbes’ acquaintance, the influential Anglican theologian Chillingworth as a possible inspiration for Hobbes’ understanding of the relationship between faith and reason.

⁴⁶ Hepburn, p. 104

to prove God's existence are doomed to fail, and that all such attempts can do is undermine faith.

For instance, Hobbes asserts that philosophy disenchants faith, and this is inimical to religion:

Therefore as soon as any proposition is demonstrated it is no longer an article of faith but it is a theorem in philosophy...as philosophy is acquired, so to the same degree is faith eroded...when the articles of faith desert religion for philosophy, religion cannot but be gradually weakened.⁴⁷

The passage suggests that either (a) Hobbes believes the erosion of religion by science is bad and therefore is comfortable building a wall between truths of science and dogmas of faith (fideism), or (b) that Hobbes sees the inverse relationship between science and religion in neutral or positive terms. Of course, he could not come out and announce his support for (b). Certainly, the preponderant opinion amongst his peers would be to see the passage in terms of fideism.

The straightforward confidence Hobbes displays elsewhere (and at the same time as this writing) in the possibility of proving God's existence is rejected, in favor of the following:

Up to now, some have declared that they have demonstrated the existence of God, the Creation of the world, and the immortality of the human soul. Their reasonings, however, have only lead weak men (such is the nature of the masses) to consider these things false, because the people who wished them to be true could not show that they were.⁴⁸

Reason has failed and will fail to provide proof. Adhering to this strategy is potentially disastrous for the faithful. A wise man would be best to submit to the proper

⁴⁷ *Anti-White*, 306.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 307.

authorities on such a matter, and not air his vain attempts to prove God's existence in public.

Hobbes also casts doubt on the fruitfulness of unrestricted inquiry, observing that when it questions articles of faith it creates an uncomfortable friction between philosophy and faith. The latter is certain to suffer in this case, perhaps with dire consequences. A philosopher in the course of inquiry

...will stumble upon a proposition that is now held by the Christian faith and that seems to contradict a conclusion he has established earlier...But he cannot conclude that it is false; for how can anyone know whether a proposition is true or false that he does not understand? Whoever, then, has flowed this way of proceeding will not impinge upon the Church's authority...nor, in sum, will he, in his efforts to buttress his creed, have to contrive unsuitable arguments, and paralogisms. These two last may cause him to impair both his own and others' faith.⁴⁹

All three of these passages seem to be strongly fideist in outlook. They highlight the insufficiency of reason when it comes to theological matters. They warn of the dangers of vain philosophers. They display a willingness to interrupt free philosophical inquiry in favor of stable religious doctrine. The passages do so more explicitly and more forcefully than elsewhere in the corpus.

A discussion from *De Corpore* ("On Matter") on the proper domains of philosophy and theology respectively is also relevant here. The work was published in 1655, but the passage may be much older.⁵⁰ In Chapter I, Hobbes writes:

The *subject* of Philosophy, or the matter it treats of, is every body of which we can conceive any generation... and therefore, where there is no generation or property, there is no philosophy. Therefore it excludes *Theology*, I mean the doctrine of God, eternal, ingenerable,

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 307–308.

⁵⁰ *De Corpore* was part of Hobbes' three-part philosophical system (*Elements of Philosophy*): of matter (1), of man (2), and on the citizen (3). Hobbes had been working on the project for years before its publication, and many passages may date from the early 1640's. See Tuck's discussion in "Hobbes and Descartes", pp. 18–26.

incomprehensible, and in whom there is nothing neither to divide nor compound, nor any generation to be conceived.⁵¹

Since God is not generated or subject to change, the philosopher has no business looking into theology.

Thus, to summarize: In *Anti-White*, Hobbes seems to say that there is not and cannot be a proof for the existence of God. *Leviathan* definitely says there are such proofs, and it is rather easy for a thinking person to come upon them. We have a paradox. Further confusion arises when we consider the development of the ideas to proceed in a flip-flop fashion: rationalist (*Elements*, written 1640, *De Cive*, 1642), fideist (*Anti-White*, 1643), rationalist (*Leviathan*, 1651), fideist (*De Corpore*, published 1655).

How then do we reconcile the explicitly fideist stance of *Anti-White* and *De Corpore* with the confident natural theology found in the political works, especially when there is little temporal (and presumably, intellectual) distance between *De Cive* and *Anti-White*? There are several candidates for an explanation.

A knee-jerk response (1) might be to claim that Hobbes simply changed his mind on the relationship between natural reason and the belief in God's existence. This seems unlikely, given both the proximity of *Anti-White*'s composition date to *De Cive* and the return to natural theology in *Leviathan*. The fideist position, sandwiched as it is between two, identical positions that seemingly contradict it, seems to have too little room to breathe. The switch back to fideism in *De Corpore* also seems inexplicable in this light, especially given the characteristic stubbornness of this author.

⁵¹ *De Corpore*, Ch. i, in *Elements*, 192.

I also dismiss the position that Hobbes simply couldn't decide what he believed or that he didn't take the question seriously. Hobbes was as a decisive a thinker as we have seen, and clearly, he did take the issue seriously enough to spend time thinking and writing about it (2).

By rejecting these two interpretations, another recourse is to simply doubt the *sincerity* of one or both of these positions (3). Curley draws the following conclusion, "I suggest that *AntiWhite* is rather an experiment with a certain kind of position, an attempt to work out what sort of position on natural religion it would be best for him [Hobbes] to take when he decided to discuss those issues in public."⁵² Curley's argument is that Hobbes did not care about which position he adopted, save for how it impacted his wider political reception. This claim is part of Curley's wider thesis that Hobbes cannot be regarded as a devout religious believer at all (a position I will consider in greater depth in the next Part). I have great sympathy with Curley's wider position that Hobbes often "wrote between the lines" and that his true thoughts about religion are at once hard to determine and probably unkind. I do think Curley may have rushed to judgment on this issue, perhaps. Consider an alternative.

This alternative (4) is found in Arrigo Pacchi's article, "Hobbes and the Problem of God." Pacchi aims to "reject the supposed contrast between Hobbes's enunciation of arguments for God's existence, and the fideistic skepticism somehow underlying his philosophical thinking"—in others words, to resolve the paradox identified above.⁵³

Pacchi's argument begins by showing that for Hobbes, the *hypothetical* assumption of a "primary cause" is a natural conclusion for a natural scientist. In this light, we can see that

⁵² Curley, Edwin, "'I durst not write so boldly", pg. 581.

⁵³ Pacchi, Arrigo. "Hobbes's Belief in God" in *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1988. 171–187. pg 178.

the “proofs” of God’s existence (or the allusions to such a proof) in the political writings, “are not ‘arguments’ in the theological sense, but only remarks about the feelings which a student of natural causes of phenomena necessarily inclines.”⁵⁴ The proofs suffice as “reassurance” that our belief in the lawlike system of nature “is really well grounded.”⁵⁵ On their own, they are insufficient for religious belief, and they require supplementation by properly theological authority.

Pacchi’s conclusion is the following: “Hobbes’s philosophy and Hobbes’s theology give us two different images of God: the philosophical God is the final, purely supposed term of a chain of material causes, the merely hypothetical conclusion at which natural reason arrives in its conditional proceeding from experience of facts; on the other hand, the God of Leviathan is the biblical God, a physically personal and theologically identified being which stimulates and warrants any orderly human society and is the unavoidable reference for political theory.”⁵⁶

These two pictures of the deity are not mutually reducible; but they are complementary. But it is important to note that in the picture Pacchi gives us, one is always subordinate to the other. Philosophy fails at a certain point, according to this reading of Hobbes, and faith steps in—“If philosophy refers man to faith, theology picks up the hint.”⁵⁷

I think Pacchi has shown the way to resolve the apparent contradiction. Hobbes would have no trouble believing in an abstract principle that was highly probable (but not

⁵⁴ Ibid., 180

⁵⁵ Ibid., 181

⁵⁶ Ibid., 186.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 186

certain) that assured the natural scientist that the universe was well-ordered. Such uncertainty is acceptable: “No discourse whatsoever can end in absolute knowledge of fact, past or to come.” (L7.3/35). Calling the probable outcome of a regression of causes “God” is not much of a theological statement. Such an argument is quiet on whether such a guarantor is an object of worship at all. The thinking man will accept the cold comfort of the philosopher’s god.

Fideism’s proper place in Hobbes’ system is in revealed theology. But here is where I think Curley’s intuitions about insincerity again become relevant. I believe fideism sits well with Hobbes’ political theory, and becomes an extremely valuable intellectual tool for the sovereign. It encourages subjects to swallow contradictions whole should they arise, without disturbing the peace. But we will have to consider these issues later.

1.2 The Divine Nature

In any case, if we can grant that for Hobbes that a high degree of confidence (but not certainty) in God’s existence is warranted by natural reason, there is not much more that can be known about God’s nature. While “it is impossible to make any profound inquiry into natural causes without being inclined to believe there is one God eternal” it remains the fact that human beings “cannot have any idea in their mind answerable to his nature” (L11.25/62) Hobbes elaborates:

For as a man that is born blind, hearing men talk of warming themselves by the fire, and being brought to war himself by the same, may easily conceive and assure himself that there is somewhat there, which men call *fire* and is the cause of the heat he feels, but cannot imagine what it is like, nor have an idea of it in his mind such as they that see it; so also, by the visible things of this world and their admirable order, a man may conceive there is a

cause of them, which men call God, and yet not have an idea or image of him in his mind.
(L11.25/62)⁵⁸

Recall that for Hobbes, ideas are images derived from sensation, and that there are no innate ideas in Hobbes' empiricist epistemology. Especially as regards natural theology, there is no direct experience of God. We must subsist on reasonable conjecture. Martinich sums this up nicely, "The reason Hobbes thinks that humans can have no idea of God is that all human ideas are analyzable or reducible to sensations and that God cannot be sensed."⁵⁹

Since we can have no proper idea of God, we are forced to be careful when we speak of the divine nature. We can say that God exists. But specifying the divine nature is a different matter.

The best statement of this position in *Leviathan* is the following:

He that will attribute to God nothing but what is warranted by natural reason must either use such negative attributes (as *infinite, eternal, incomprehensible*) or superlatives (as *most high, most great*, and the like), and in such sense as if he meant not to declare what he is (for that were to circumscribe him with the limits of our fancy,) but how much we admire him, and how ready we would be to obey him, which is a sign of humility, and of a will to honor him as much as we can. For there is but one name to signify our conception of his nature, and that is, I AM; and but one name of his relation to us, and that is, God, in which is contained Father, King, and Lord. (L31.28/240)

It is crucial that, "in the attributes which we give to God, we are not to consider the signification of philosophical truth, but the signification of pious intention, to do him the greatest honor we are able" (L31.33/241). By being self-consciously non-literal, we can avoid the traps of Scholastic reasoning.

We can also avoid causing a public scandal, which in its original meaning, is "Something that hinders reception of the faith or obedience to the Divine law; an occasion

⁵⁸ The metaphor of the blind man and fire is a recurring one with early roots. It first shows up in Hobbes' objections to Descartes' *Meditations* and makes a repeat appearance in the *Elements*, Ch xi.2.

⁵⁹ Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan*, pg. 186. The argument holds true whether or not Hobbes is read sincerely or not.

of unbelief or moral lapse; a stumbling-block”.⁶⁰ Disputing these matters in public, within earshot of the multitude, seems to be what Hobbes has most in mind here. He seems to be less inclined to regulate the speculative arguments of scientists and philosopher conducted behind closed doors.

This inability to speak meaningfully of God is often referred to as “negative theology,” so-called because one is justified primarily in saying only what God *is not*, as opposed to what he is. In one form or another this account of the divine nature runs throughout Hobbes’ political works. By taking this position, Hobbes finds himself along with many mainstream theologians. AP Martinich notes that this position places Hobbes in fairly orthodox company, “to affirm the incomprehensibility of God was standard among both medieval and modern Christian thinkers”.⁶¹

But in addition to its orthodox pedigree,⁶² the account fits well with what we can call Hobbes’ anti-realist epistemology and with his nominalist account of language.⁶³

“Realism” in the sense I am using it here is an epistemological position which says that the sources of our experience (the “things in themselves”) directly resemble our experiences of them, under normal circumstances, that is, most of the time. There is a regular, lawlike correspondence between the thing in itself and our perception of that thing. Aristotle is said to be the chief proponent of this position, and it is the fundamental

⁶⁰ Oxford English Dictionary, online.

⁶¹ Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan*, pg. 191–2.

⁶² It is surprising how many of Hobbes’ materialist positions can be linked to “orthodox” theological positions. A whole school of thought exists that interprets Hobbes in an increasingly mainstream Christian light. See AP Martinich, *Two Gods of Leviathan*, for a sustained argument along these lines. We will consider the relationship of determinism and predestination in the next chapter, with less optimism about Hobbes’ orthodoxy.

⁶³ See the discussions of Hobbes’ science in Tuck, *Hobbes* (especially p. 40–50), “Hobbes and Descartes,” and in the Introduction to his edition of *Leviathan*.

supposition of pre-modern scientific thought. In fact, it is arguable that the epistemological dimension of Modernity first comes about precisely when realism is rejected.⁶⁴

Hobbes, along with thinkers like Descartes and Kant, is an anti-realist because he denies the basic tenet of realism. He holds that there is no necessary relationship of similarity between the cause of our sensations and the sensations themselves—“the object is one thing, the image or fancy is another” (7). By denying the necessity of the autonomous universe’s similarity to our own experience, Hobbes opens up a skeptical gap in our perception. Even what appears to be indubitable in our experience can be misguided. Our impression of God, derived from empirical data, may be flatly wrong. We could very well be like that blind man who supposes the existence of fire that Hobbes repeatedly refers to. The parallels with Kant and his discussion of the thing-in-itself are relevant here, especially his cautions about the impossibility of “intuiting” the noumenal, and the dangers of “enthusiasm”—believing one has seen the noumenal.

A similar skeptical conclusion follows from Hobbes’ nominalist claims about words. He argues that there is “nothing in the world universal but names; for the things named are every one of them individual and singular” (17). He further claims that “*true* and *false* are attributes of speech, not things” (18). There is a gap, then, between speech and the thing it names. There are no “natural kinds”, labels metaphysically printed on things that tell us what

⁶⁴ Tuck, “Hobbes and Descartes”, pg. 28–29. Tuck argues that the birth of Modern philosophy occurred when philosophers embraced the skeptical critique of Aristotle’s realism, but sought to move beyond doubt into something positive. The answer was to try and find truth in experience, not in the things themselves. Tuck argues that many of the early Moderns were anxious to demonstrate that they had discovered this shift from things to perception. It may account for some of the acrimony between Hobbes and Descartes. Ultimately, Tuck argues that the honor belongs to Galileo.

they are and into which category they belong. Names, both particular and universal, are human inventions.⁶⁵

While the process of assigning names to things is not completely arbitrary, Hobbes does seem to allow for the process to be flawed. One false move, and “errors of definitions multiply themselves as the reckoning proceeds, and lead men into absurdities” (19). Words are the currency of both the wise and the foolish, without them no one can be exceptionally insightful or remarkably daft (19).

Hobbes’ negative theology is also corroborated by his dismissal of the notion that we have an (adequate) idea of *infinity*. He writes:

Whatsoever we imagine is *finite*...When we say anything is infinite, we signify only that we are not able to conceive the ends and bounds of the thing named, having no conception of the thing, but of our own inability. And therefore the name of *God* is used, not to make us conceive him (for he is *incomprehensible*, and his greatness and power are unconceivable), but that we may honor him. (15)

This passage does not seem to foreclose the possibility that genuine infinity exists, but only that we cannot conceive of it accurately or perceive it directly. In other words, we cannot imagine God except incompletely. Hence, since God is outside of human understanding, we must be delicate in the way we discuss Him. We must be careful not to press too hard on our inadequate conceptions, and project an anthropomorphism onto God. But this temptation, as we have seen, is part of our psychic makeup. Perhaps only the philosophic few can truly think clearly.

⁶⁵ Hobbes does waver a little on this point, arguing that “The first author of speech was *God* himself, that instruct *Adam* how to name such creatures as he presented to his sight”, implying that there are natural kinds and that humanity had clear knowledge of them at one point. But Hobbes notes he does “not find anything in Scripture out of which, directly or by consequence, can be gathered that Adam was taught the names of all figures, numbers, measures, color, sounds, fancies, much less the names of words and speech” (L4.1/16). Hobbes uses the tower of Babel as a way to return to nominalism, and subsequently never returns to the Edenic use of language.

Another benefit of the position of negative theology, in my mind far more important, is its political implications. By giving us very little to say about God on the basis of our individual reason, Hobbes pushes questions about God into the realm of revelation. On the face of it, this is a fairly traditional move. But when we consider in detail that Hobbes' account of revelation hinges almost entirely on sovereign interpretation, then negative theology only further empowers the position of the sovereign to make rules about religion. There is no effective, independent standpoint from which to argue about God with the sovereign.

Therefore, there are sound philosophical reasons native to Hobbes' system, and not just arguments from authority, for him to adopt this stance.

Nevertheless, if we adopt Pacchi's suggestion that there are two "Gods" in *Leviathan*, we need to nuance this account of negative theology. Certainly, the God that is warranted by rational inquiry seems to possess certain real attributes, the primary of which is the omnipotence to order the universe. Of course, this need only be a methodological assumption, a condition for the possibility of doing science, a fact of reason, etc.⁶⁶ It need not be elevated to the position of *knowledge*. The rules of negative theology apply fully to the God of worship, not the God of cosmological order. One seems personal, the other impersonal, almost a mere principle.

The resulting picture inspires Richard Tuck to claim that, "Hobbes's idea of a natural religion can fairly be described as 'deist'".⁶⁷ By "deist" Tuck is referring to the "Divine Watchmaker" model, where the Supreme Being orders the universe according to inflexible

⁶⁶ Kant's observations on knowledge are surprisingly helpful when it comes to Hobbes.

⁶⁷ Tuck, *Hobbes*, 80.

natural laws and lets it progress without directly intervening. I agree with Tuck on this. The God of Hobbes' natural theology is omnipotent, but distant—there is no basis from natural reason alone to assume that divine intervention has or will occur. Furthermore, as regards his revealed theology, Hobbes claims that miracles have ceased, and that the only supernatural events to come are those of the Final Judgment, which seems to be a long way off. So even with revelation included, Hobbes seems to leave us in an *effectively* deistic world.

However, the following passage from *Leviathan* may dispute the deist interpretation: “they who attributing (as they think) ease to God take from him the care of mankind, take from him his honor” (L31.17/239). The suggestion is that denying God's active involvement in the affairs of human beings is blasphemous and since a deist interpretation denies miraculous intervention, then deism is blasphemous.⁶⁸

I think we can deflate the controversy if we note three things about the ambiguities of this supposed counterevidence. First, we can observe that saying God *cannot* intervene in history would be attributing a lack of power to Him. This would violate Hobbes' commitment to a negative theology. The deist interpretation could consistently maintain that God *does not* intervene, which is different from claiming he cannot. Since Hobbes argues later that miracles have ceased occurring, this interpretation can hold for the present. Humanity currently subsists between the time of past miracles and the time of future miracles; physics is effectively deist in this age. The fact that this is politically convenient on both theoretic and concrete levels for Hobbes should not be surprising. Besides, we must not press too

⁶⁸ See, for instance, the discussion in David Wootton's “Unbelief in Early Modern Europe”, especially pp. 84–7.

much about God's nature anyways. Our intention, according to Hobbes, is to honor, not to comprehend.

Second, the passage does not mention miraculous intervention *per se*, but the “care of mankind”. This is more like denying that God cares for human beings at all, which would be to declare God unmerciful or apathetic or some other insult. This sort of disparagement is ruled out by Hobbes’ theological stance. The universe can “care” for human beings in all sorts of non-interventionist, merely supportive ways, for instance ensuring that the universe continues to exist and operate smoothly. Moreover, if God’s role is to *sustain* the universe from instant to instant (as in Descartes’ Third *Meditation*, to note a leading contemporaneous example, later carried into the modern era by Levinas), then God plays an active role in the care of the universe (and mankind), even if this care is only according to well-established rules of physics, etc.

Third, the scope of the term atheist in Hobbes’s time most commonly included the denial of providence. In fact, “The link between atheism and immorality was believed to be so close that it was almost universally assumed that anyone who denied God’s providence must be immoral”.⁶⁹ One could say, that “Someone who admits the existence of God, but denies that God has any concern for human beings, will be no better than one who simply denies the existence of God.”⁷⁰ Hobbes might have been anxious in this context to avoid any semblance of denying an active providence, because that was such an audacious step. So he included a caution against denying providence to spare himself some grief.

⁶⁹ Wootton, David, “Unbelief in Early Modern Europe”, *History Workshop* 20 (1985: Autumn), 82–100, pg. 86.

⁷⁰ Curley, n2, *Leviathan*, pp. 234–5.

One might be tempted to say that “Hobbes never displayed what we might call a true religious sensibility, that if he did believe in God, it was in a remote, abstract, intellectualized deity who could give little comfort to Hobbes’s contemporaries.”⁷¹ Ultimately, I think the deist label is more or less accurate when it comes to Hobbes’ primary beliefs about the nature of the universe. His attempts to deflect criticism on these matters seem to be prudential.

This reluctance to speak literally of God’s attributes does not prevent Hobbes from arguing against the possibility of God doing wrong. God possesses the Divine Right to all things. Hobbes argues,

the kingdom over men, and the right of afflicting men at his pleasure, belongeth naturally to God Almighty, not as Creator and gracious, but as omnipotent, and though punishment be due for sin only (because by that word is understood affliction for sin), yet the right of afflicting is not always derived from men’s sin, but from God’s power. (236)

The Divine Right is merely the Right of Nature coupled with unlimited power.⁷²

Curley comments on this passage that “Hobbes’ position in this paragraph resembles the voluntarism we find in Reformation theologians like Luther and Calvin, who hold that God’s will determines what is right.”⁷³ The following passage in Calvin is clear enough:

For God’s will is so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever he wills, by the very fact that he wills it, must be considered righteous. When, therefore, one asks why God has so done, we must reply: because he has willed it. But if you proceed further to ask why

⁷¹ Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan*, pg. 44.

⁷² “The RIGHT OF NATURE, which writers commonly call *jus naturale*, is the liberty each man hath to use his own power, as he will himself for the preservation of his own nature, that is to say, of his own life, and consequently of doing anything which, in his own judgment and reason, he shall conceive to be the aptests means thereunto.” (L14.1/79). Now take away fear of death and any other limitations.

⁷³ *Leviathan*, pg. 237, n6. In a move consistent with his Anti-Hellenism, Hobbes does provide an answer to the question of the *Euthyphro*, although not the answer Socrates seems to be fishing for.

he so willed, you are seeking something greater and higher than God's will, which cannot be found.⁷⁴

Of course, this theological *voluntarism*, where God's will is primary, rather than his intellect or other faculties, when viewed from the correct angle, is just a special case of Hobbes' wider *political* voluntarism, where the will of the sovereign is chief among all things. God is like the sovereign of a country; in the same way the sovereign's acts of will must be followed because he is the sovereign, so, on a much grander scale, God's will makes law for the universe. The sovereign (a Mortal God) can commit no injustice, because his word is law; God is the same. The overwhelming force of a worldly sovereign is nothing compared to the limitless might of the Deity. Oakeshott situates Hobbes' political theory under the "master-conception" of "Will and Artifice," drawing attention to this very theme in Hobbes.⁷⁵

It is no accident that Hobbes' discussion of the book of Job follows immediately after the section on God's unfettered Right to rule. The undeserved misery of Job has presented a conundrum for theologians committed to a belief in God's benevolence. A common response in the Reformation (Luther, Calvin) was to argue that God's will makes an action right, however hardhearted it seems to mortals. Hobbes uses Job's story in a similar way, to bolster the point regarding the justice of any divine action, however seemingly cruel or arbitrary. To those who challenge God's justice, he can ask, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding."⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Calvin, Jean. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, Ch. XXIII, §2. Calvin does go on to argue that God's reasons for willing in such a way are inscrutable to the mortal mind. Calvin clearly did not have Hobbes' idea of sovereignty in mind, but the two do link up with their emphasis on the role of the (Divine) sovereign's will as primary.

⁷⁵ Oakeshott, "Introduction", pg. 8.

⁷⁶ Job 38:4 (King James Version).

Hobbes thus advances a cold-blooded theodicy common among theologians of his time. There is no evil in the world that comes from God, because God's will makes an action right. Hobbes' position is unique because it flows from a fully developed theory of sovereignty, mapped onto divine power as its paradigmatic example. It serves his political ends and his earthly goals.

While we have emphasized the support that Hobbes' negative theology draws from his philosophical outlook, it should also be clear that there are *tensions* with the rest of that system as well. Here I want to briefly consider two objections arising from other parts of Hobbes' system. The first is a result of Hobbes' materialist position (a). The second has to do with Hobbes' suspicion towards metaphorical speech (b).

(a) There are several complications with this figurative, non-literal view of the Divine Nature and Hobbes' explicit commitment to a materialist ontology. The latter seemingly forces us by a strict chain of reasoning to envision God as material, and consequently as far more limited (and definite) than we would have initially granted.⁷⁷

Hobbes observes in the prefatory remarks to Chapter 34 of *Leviathan*:

For the *universe*, being the aggregate of all bodies, there is no real part thereof that is not also *body*, nor anything properly a *body* that is not also part of (that aggregate of all *bodies*) the *universe*. (261)

A passage immediately following this one strengthens this point, and concludes, "that the proper signification of *spirit* in common speech, is either a subtle, fluid, and invisible body, or a ghost, or other idol or phantasm of the imagination" (262). In other

⁷⁷ See Curley's review of Hobbes' texts in his "I durst not write so boldly", pp. 582–8. Curley maintains that in the *Anti-White*, Hobbes seems to grant the validity of dualism.

words, spirits are either like the air (thin and subtle, but nonetheless material) or they are hallucinations, virtual images, etc. with no real existence.⁷⁸

Is God, then, a material thing to Hobbes? Yes. This seems to follow logically from what has been said throughout the book, and in fact, Hobbes explicitly draws this conclusion in the third Appendix to the Latin *Leviathan* (albeit through the device of an interlocutor in a dialogue).⁷⁹ The speaker, “B,” claims: “He [Hobbes, presumably] affirms, of course, that God is a body” (L.App3.6/540). B goes on:

“We all are, and are moved in God”—these are the words of the apostle. Be we all have quantity. Can a being which has quantity be in what does not have quantity? God is great, but it is impossible to understand greatness without a body. (541)

Aside from the frankness of the passage, what is truly astonishing is that the stunning (supposed) confession of Hobbes’ greatest sin in the eyes of his contemporaries has been buried so long in a text that didn’t see English translation until 1991!⁸⁰ This bold admission brings with it attendant difficulties. Among Hobbes’ contemporaries, to argue that the universe was solely matter was akin to atheism. God was clearly spirit; matter was not; to deny the existence of spirit was to deny the existence of God. Matter was by definition finite, localized, capable of alteration and division, etc., properties which were inconsistent with the Godhead. Something material could be bounded and limited, which is precisely the inverse

⁷⁸ See Samuel Mintz’s enlightening discussion of Hobbes’ materialism in *The Hunting of Leviathan*, especially Chapter IV.

⁷⁹ Curley points this out in the Introduction to his version of *Leviathan*: “Hobbes makes it difficult to ascribe any idea expressed in the Appendix to him personally by writing a dialogue between two characters identified in only the most colorless way, as ‘A’ and ‘B.’ Prima facie, we are barred from identifying either of these people with Hobbes by the fact that they refer to Hobbes in the third person. Since A is usually asking the questions and B is usually giving the answers, it’s natural to think that B must nevertheless be Hobbes. But A is permitted to make good points and raise provocative questions. One aim in using the dialogue form seem to be to prevent us from being certain which character represents Hobbes, if any does (cf. xlv, 42). It makes a nice puzzle” (Curley, xlvii). One need not be as Straussian in their outlook on Hobbes as Curley is to see this; Hobbes the slippery rhetorician seems to lead the reader to this sort of thing naturally.

⁸⁰ I share Curley’s lamentation of this fact (see xlv of his Introduction).

of God. Bramhall puts it succinctly, “That there is no incorporeal spirit, is the main root of Atheisme, from which so many lesser branches are daily sprouting up.”⁸¹

Hobbes is willing to bite that bullet, however, remarking of God that “I leave him to be a most pure, simple, invisible spirit corporeal.”⁸²

Modern readers also find materialism and theology tough to reconcile. Hepburn, for instance, points to an unresolved tension in Hobbes’ account of God’s action in the world: “He writes of God as a being whose transcendence of our experience is so thoroughgoing that we can only bow the knee and utter words without truth value; but he writes of God also as a being whose immanence, whose continuity with the world, is so thoroughgoing that he becomes a natural cause among causes.”⁸³

Curley believes that he identifies a deeper (and more well-defined) problem resulting from Hobbes materialism and his account of God, one that gets picked up and repeated in other places in the literature. Consider those two passages (mentioned above) from *Leviathan* as premises:

1. The universe is the aggregate of all bodies (Ch. xxxiv)
2. God is a body (Appendix iii)

When brought together, we are apparently faced with a dilemma:

3. “Therefore, God is identical either [α] with the whole of the universe or [β] with a part of it”⁸⁴

⁸¹ Bramhall, *The Catching of Leviathan*, 121.

⁸² Hobbes, *An Answer to Bishop Bramhall*, EW, IV, 313. I thank Curley for calling this passage to my attention.

⁸³ Hepburn, p. 108

⁸⁴ Curley, “I durst not write so boldly”, 587, the brackets are mine; Curley claims to have derived this argument from Leo Strauss.

If we choose $[\alpha]$, then God is synonymous with the universe (a form of pantheism) and the universe has no cause. This, as the argument goes, is equivalent to atheism. If, on the contrary, we choose $[\beta]$, we seemingly make God finite. This, also is a form of atheism, a denial of God's omnipotence.

Hobbes seems to reject the pantheism of alternative $[\alpha]$: "For by God is understood the cause of the world; and to say the world is God is to say there is no cause of it, that is, no God" (L31.15/239). Hence, it seems we must choose $[\beta]$, an equally unsatisfactory choice, and one at odds with Hobbes' own statements on the matter.

One way out of the difficulty might be to exploit the ambiguity of "finite" in alternative $[\beta]$. Finite here can mean "localized in space" or it can mean "less than almighty". "Localized in space" does not necessarily mean "incapable of perceiving the entire universe" nor does it mean "incapable of acting on the whole universe" either. Zeus was thought to be king of the Greek gods, but he lived in a certain place and inhabited a particular body. If we accept the terms of the argument, this seems to be the best we can do: that God is localized in space. This is clearly unsatisfactory, given Hobbes' clear and repeated declarations that *any* attribution of place implies that "whatsoever is in place is bounded and finite" (241)—that is, not omnipotent. The way Curley wants out is to reject the existence of God altogether, and he reads Hobbes as setting up just this sort of dilemma to lead his more attentive readers to water.

I think an important problem is with the way the argument is framed. We should always be careful when trying to talk literally about the divine under the preconditions Hobbes sets for us. He maintains that "disputing of God's nature is contrary to his honor" (241). Quibbling about the extent of God's infinity is one of those situations where the

confident philosopher will crash into a truth of religion (like the passage in *Anti-White* anticipates). Hobbes' response here is to insist the philosopher stop and concede that he doesn't understand the proposition fully, and to let it lie. It is above our reason. And by the way, listen to the sovereign when he tells you that!

There are other, more rationalist alternatives. Two come to mind. The first is that the God of the cold, material universe is merely is hypothetical unity under a scheme of physical laws. God is not a person, "He" is a principle. This sits well with Pacchi's suggestions above. Another argument would be to see God as both infinite and material, but so subtle that He permeates all other matter. The rest of universe floats in, and is saturated by, the fluid that is God.

(b) The final difficulty I want to consider in negative theology arises when we examine the kinds of speech we are supposed to use in reference to God and Hobbes' explicit comments on language in Chapter iv ("Of Speech") of *Leviathan*. Early on, Hobbes identifies metaphorical speech as one of four abuses to which language is vulnerable, because it can easily lead to deception (intentional or otherwise). He repeats this criticism in the next Chapter, alluding to "metaphors, tropes, and other rhetorical figures" (25) as the cause of "absurd conclusions" (24) in ratiocination. Admittedly, "these are less dangerous" than other abuses of speech, "because they profess their inconstancy," but there is still a risk of taking them literally (22).

But Hobbes is inconsistent in his criticism of metaphor. One needn't look further than the title of his masterpiece to see metaphor at work. Hobbes uses metaphors when he wants to, whether to ridicule his enemies or to interpret the Bible. He criticizes them when they don't do what he wants. They seem to lead to abuse only when other people use them.

Ultimately, I do think Hobbes accepted the likelihood of some proof for the existence of an impersonal God. But I do not think he held this being in greater esteem than the wonder and awe a true scientist feels for the natural world (no small amount, of course, but short of worship). Hobbes does recognize that religion is much wider than realizing the orderliness of the cosmos, and he takes important steps to integrate religion through reason alone into his political thought. Religion is as much practice as belief, worship as dogma.

2. *Natural Worship*

We can now turn to Hobbes' natural theology of worship. The primary loci of Hobbes' account is in Chapter 31 of *Leviathan*, "Of the Kingdom of God by Nature". Not coincidentally, this is the final Chapter of the first half of the work, closing the "Reason" half of *Leviathan* and leading into the half on "Revelation". Since worship is about practice, this aspect of Hobbes' theory links up closely with his theory of obligation and other elements of his political theory.

A basic political problem that is a constant focus throughout *Leviathan* is how to describe the relationship between civil and divine authority. All civilized people are under the command of a sovereign, but: "Whether men will or not, they must be subject always to the divine power" as well (L31.2/234). A citizen can easily face the dilemma, where one, "either by too much civil obedience offends the Divine Majesty, or through fear of offending God transgresses the commandments of the commonwealth" (L31.1/234). Hence, Hobbes now moves to clarify what is meant by the "Kingdom of God" within the bounds of reason alone, and specify the duties of citizen to both sovereign and to God.

Hobbes does not define worship up front, as he normally does, but waits until Chapter 45 to offer something like a definition:

But the inward thoughts of men, which appear outwardly in their words and actions, are the signs of out honoring, and these go by the name of WORSHIP (in Latin, cultus). Therefore, to pray to, to swear by, to obey, to be diligent and officious in serving—in sum, all words and actions that betoken fear to offend or desire to please—is *worship*, whether those words and actions be sincere or feigned; and because they appear as signs of honoring, are ordinarily also called honor. (L45.12/443)

Recall that for Hobbes, “*Honorable* is whatsoever possession, action, or quality is an argument and sign of power” (53). Since God is believed to have limitless power, he is owed a high debt of honor and respect.

Worship is naturally owed to God in an analogous fashion to the way in which obedience is owed to a sovereign.⁸⁵ Both share the same three internal grounds—*love* of the benefits the ruler provides, *hope* for more, and *fear* of the wrath of the mighty (L31.9/238). These internal grounds manifest themselves in three modes of external worship: praise, magnifying, and blessing. Praise and magnifying can lead to words and actions; blessing is only words, according to Hobbes (L31.9/238).

God differs from the mortal sovereign, however, in possessing a *limitless* fund of power: “The right of nature whereby God reigneth over men, and punisheth those that break his laws, is to be derived, not from his creating them (as if he required obedience, as of gratitude for his benefits), but from his *irresistible power*.” (L31.5/235). We cannot escape the jurisdiction of God. We must regard Him as the most high, even if we are not Christians, because the natural laws are God’s universal gift to all mankind.

Honor and worship can take many forms. Some of these are natural, understood by all people. Some of these are arbitrary, made “by institution or custom of men”

⁸⁵ After all, the sovereign is a “Mortal God”.

(L31.10/238). For example, spitting in a sacred place is (probably) universally regarded as improper worship, but the choice of Sunday versus Saturday as a holy day is arbitrary.

Arbitrary worship can be voluntary (“free”), wherein the worship expresses our sincere, personal reverence. Arbitrary worship can also be command by a sovereign power, and “When it is commanded, not the words or the gesture, but the *obedience*, is the worship.” (L31.11/238, emphasis mine). Some actions cannot be made into worshipful actions even by command, because they are inherent disrespectful. But “there be an infinite number of actions and gestures of an indifferent nature” (L31.39/242), that the sovereign has wide latitude for deciding the modes of worship.

Paul Johnson notes that the decisions made by the sovereign with regard to implementing the natural laws into the form of positive law are analogous to the decision of which modes of worship are appropriate. Johnson notes “the natural laws prescribe at best a certain *form* which must be given *content* and *applicability* by positive law...This same relationship hold regarding worshipful actions.”⁸⁶ An abstraction is concretized by the actions of authority, and fixes certain elements in place that acquire the force of law where they did not have it before and perhaps they do not possess in other jurisdictions.

Worship can also be private or public. Private worship is that which is done by citizens of their own concern, in their own way. When conducted in secret, it is free from interference, but “in the sight of the multitude, it is never without some restraint, either from the laws or from the opinion of men, which is contrary to the nature of liberty.” (L31.12/239). If worship occurs in public, it can and will be circumscribed by public rules.

⁸⁶ Johnson, “Hobbes’s Anglican Doctrine of Salvation”, pg. 117, emphasis mine.

“Public is the worship that a commonwealth performeth as one person. Public, in respect of the whole commonwealth, is free; but in respect of particular men it is not so.” (L31.12/238–9). This is important. The commonwealth worships freely, in that the sovereign, the commonwealth’s *will*, choose how to worship as he or she sees fit. It is a single person, on Hobbes’ theory. The individuals who comprise the commonwealth, are not free in their public worship, because they subordinate their wills to that of the commonwealth. Hobbes envisions many will do this without dissent, but even those who dissent must observe the rules and keep their reservations to themselves. In the final analysis, there is little room for significant religious decisions not controlled by the sovereign.

But a side effect of Hobbes’ externally-based classification of worship is that inner thoughts and feelings about religious issues are free from interference by their very nature. This has prompted some writers to see signs of a Hobbes who secretly endorses something like Lockean toleration. This goes too far. Hobbes does seem to permit secret worship and private opinions being free from interference. He is not advocating an Inquisition or an Orwellian thought police. And, as we shall see, Hobbes does account for the ineluctable freedom of inner thoughts, but he still demands an absolute conformity to external rules. If he is a tolerationist, it is more for scientific truth.

There is, obviously, an important difference between the worship owed to powerful men and that owed to God:

The end of worship amongst men is power. For where a man seeth another worshipped, he supposeth him powerful, and is the readier to obey him, which makes his power greater. But God has no ends; the worship we do him proceeds from our duty, and is directed according to our capacity, by those rules of honor that reason dictateth to be done by the weak to the

more potent men, in hope of benefit, for fear of damage, or in thankfulness for good already received from them. (L31.13/239)

Incidentally, that means that, on the basis of natural reason, we cannot really know what God wants, except by analogy to our own condition. We can only hope that our words and actions are acceptable. God is inscrutable, and anyone who claims otherwise probably has secret designs.

We have seen that there are two primary ways that natural reason teaches us to worship God, the first corresponds to our beliefs about him, our publicly-stated “words”, the second to “actions of divine worship” (L31.29/240). Regarding the former, we are obligated to hold the negative theology outlined in the first part of this chapter. We are commanded to maintain first and foremost that God exists, and that he is the cause of the world, the Creator, infinite, incomprehensible, impassible, etc. We are to do these things in public and in the ways commanded by the authorities. These commands are less cognitive beliefs than expressions of devotion, both to God and to the state. When speaking in public, we need to take especial care.

Hobbes identifies eight aspects pertaining to the actions of worship, many of them conventional and traditional: (1) prayer, (2) thanksgiving, (3) gift giving, (4) swearing by God (and God alone), (5) speaking respectfully of God (while not disputing his nature), (6) “that prayers and thanksgiving be made in words and phrases, not sudden, nor light, nor plebian, but beautiful and well composed” (L31.34/241), (7) “reason directeth not only to worship God in secret, but also, and especially, in public, and in the sight of men” (L31.35/242), and finally, (8) obedience to divine law: “the greatest worship of all” (L31.36/242). These final three, however, deserve special mention.

Hobbes is placing himself on the side of the conservative Anglican expression of faith, through things like the Book of Common Prayer, when he emphasizes the nature of prayers. One of the conflicts in liturgy in Hobbes' time was between those who rejected a uniform set of prayers and preferred to sermonize spontaneously, and those who preferred a shared body of prayers and ceremonies. Hobbes falls into the latter camp both because he was conservative with regard to most institutions, and because the sermonizing of "godly" preachers struck him as potentially dangerous demagoguery. Spontaneous, unbounded sermonizing placed the preacher at the center of the congregation, establishing him as a charismatic figure who could mislead the people away from the rule of law. Emphasizing preaching over ritual was associated with the Independent movement.⁸⁷

The special place of collective, public worship is another occasion for Hobbes to drive home his absolutist theory of sovereignty:

But seeing a commonwealth is but one person, it ought also to exhibit to God but one worship, which then it doth when it commandeth it to be exhibited by private men publicly. And this is public worship, the property whereof is to be uniform; for those actions that are done differently by different men cannot be said to be a public worship. And therefore, where many sorts of worship be allowed, proceeding from the different religions of private men, it cannot be said that there is any public worship, nor that the commonwealth is of any religion at all. (L31/37/242)⁸⁸

By being "but one person" the commonwealth exhibits one will. Because Hobbes does not have a theory of democratic representation, a *General Will*, the will of the commonwealth must be the will of an individual, the sovereign. This top-down expression renders Hobbes incapable of tolerating *external* deviance from a common standard.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ For a discussion of some of these issues, see Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Later Reformation in England, 1547–1603*, 2nd edition, especially pp 69–73.

⁸⁸ The marginal caption for this section reads "Public Worship consisteth in Uniformity".

⁸⁹ See Manent, Pierre. "Hobbes and the New Political Art" in *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*. Trans. Rebecca Balinski. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1995. 20–38, especially p. 28.

Hobbes, in the same place, but almost as an aside, asserts “And that which is said in the Scripture, ‘It is better to obey God than men,’ hath place in the kingdom of God by pact, and not by nature.” (L31.39/242). Clarendon saw fit to highlight this mention of the Scripture in his *Survey*, expressing his displeasure at Hobbes’ all-too-quick dismissal of a passage “which he could not but find did press him very hard and was worthy of a better answer” than the one Hobbes gave.⁹⁰ Bramhall mentions it as well, arguing “nature it self doth teach us that it is better to obey God, then men.”⁹¹ Hobbes meant that unless we are directly covenanted to God, as the Israelites were, or the future subjects of God’s earthly kingdom as the elect are believed to be, we are always to obey the commands of God’s “intermediary” on earth, the sovereign. We cannot go outside the chain of command, so to speak. His contemporaries saw the skepticism entailed by this position.

How does the God of natural religion fit into Hobbes’ theory of obligation, if at all? One might be tempted to say, “not at all”. Hobbes, after all, is famous for arguing moral positivism “Where there is no common power, there is no law; where there is no law, no injustice.” (L.13.13/78). He also stakes a relativist position: “Good and evil are names that signify our appetites and aversion, which in different tempers, customs, and doctrines of men are different; and diverse men differ not only in their judgment on the senses...but also what is conformable or disagreeable to reason in the actions of common life.” (L15.40/100).

But, to many critics, Hobbes’ account of the natural laws is a statement of God’s commands. In a striking passage early on (Ch. 13) in *Leviathan*, Hobbes makes the following observation about the natural law:

⁹⁰ *Survey*, pg. 188.

⁹¹ Bramhall, *The Catching of Leviathan*, pg. 133.

These dictates of reason men use to call by the name of laws, but improperly; for they are but conclusions or theorems concerning what conduceth to the conservation and defense of themselves, whereas law, properly, is the word of him that by right hath command over others. But yet if we consider the same theorems, as delivered in the word of God, that by right commandeth all things; then are they properly called laws. (100)

This passage is crucial in certain early 20th-century interpretations of Hobbes, notably those of AE Taylor and Howard Warrender. Taylor, and Warrender after him, argue that Hobbes has a strong, deontological theory of obligation and that the theory derives from divine command, arguing that “A certain kind of theism is absolutely necessary to make the theory work.”⁹² Without the element of divine command, Taylor argues, Hobbes cannot truly be said to have a theory of obligation at all. Taylor saw himself as preserving the only viable shred of Hobbes’ theory, but was forced to reject the entirety of Hobbes’ psychology in order to do so.

The resulting theism is not very strong, and not very Christian. Taylor argues that “Hobbes’s religion...consisted, as Kant’s did, almost exclusively in the discharge of everyday morality with an accompanying sense of their transcendent obligatoriness. It is clear that he was not ‘religious’ in any deeper sense of the word”.⁹³

The interpretation has fallen into disrepute, however, for precisely the reason that it leaves so much behind. Taylor’s Hobbes is a naked skeleton of Hobbes’ theory, stripped of the egoistic flesh that defines Hobbesian theory to so many minds. It distills a theory of binding moral obligation out of Hobbes that he perhaps never intended nor would have preferred.

But we can agree with Warrender and Taylor on at least this much, Hobbes sought to fortify his account of natural law by an appeal to divine command, *at least on the surface*. For

⁹² Taylor, “The ethical doctrine of Hobbes”, in *Hobbes Studies*, pg. 50.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pg. 53.

those who were unable to accept his purely natural, rational incentives to obedience, the additional motivational force of divine authority was helpful. Lloyd argues, that “Hobbes is intending to provide people with reasons – with considerations that they, given their interests and allegiances, can regard as reasons – for adhering to the principle that one is to obey one’s existing effective political authority unconditionally”.⁹⁴

By claiming that the natural laws are a version of God’s command, Hobbes resolves the issue with which we opened this section: the potential conflict, in the natural kingdom of God at least, between the sovereign and God. The sovereign is given full powers to interpret and codify the natural laws. On this interpretation, all the sovereign is doing is putting divine law into effect. In such a situation, the sovereign can never conflict with the commands of God. Thus, there is no conflict, in the kingdom of God by nature between our earthly rulers and God. The matter would be easy, if there were not another source of God’s commands, themselves potential powder kegs. The second half of *Leviathan* addresses the potential conflict between the rules of the sovereign and revelation.

All crimes deserve punishment. Since God can see and punish all crimes, the violation of divine laws must necessarily lead to natural punishments. Hobbes observes: “For seeing punishments are consequent to the breach of laws, natural punishments must be naturally consequent to the breach of the laws of nature, and therefore follow them as their natural, no arbitrary effects” (L31.40/243). The argument is that sin does not profit the sinner, and that in spite of what may seem to be the case, there are always attendant

⁹⁴ SA Lloyd, *Ideals as Interests in Leviathan*, pg. 267. I think Lloyd is correct in the basic argument, but I disagree with her that Hobbes argued in this multifaceted way because he himself was convinced by religious reasons. I do not think it necessary for him to do so, nor do I think that he was being sincere. But that quarrel will occur later on.

punishments for evil acts. We can see some of these effects clearly, as when a heavy drinker suffers health problems later in life. Others are more occult, and occur at the end “of so long a chain of consequences as no human providence is high enough to give a man a prospect to the end” (243). Despite this, the consequences are real and their connection with violations of the natural law is strongly maintained by Hobbes in this section. Again, I think this is another example of an ideological move by Hobbes. Hobbes grants that we cannot always see the connection between our misdeeds and our punishments, but he insists that it is real. Someone on the fence about violating a natural law might think twice if they believe they would inevitably be punished for it, much like the modern person who behaves morally out of fear for “bad karma” or “what goes around comes around”. The argument seems to fly in the face of our experience of the prosperity of the wicked, but Hobbes is at home with such a paranoid argument, because it serves his purposes. A realistic state couldn’t police its citizens comprehensively, at least as Hobbes could see it. Tricks like this pick up some of the slack, shifting the burden to the conscience of the would-be offender. If reason doesn’t convince, Hobbes is happy to rely on fear.

According to Richard Tuck, this notion of *necessary* natural punishment for sins was something that Hobbes derived from Selden, and which he shared with writers of the Tew Circle among others.⁹⁵ By doing this, Selden “moved to a completely individualistic and hedonistic view of moral obligation, the development of which in later English moral philosophy was to be of central importance.”⁹⁶ Tuck explains that this is because the linkage between immorality and punishment puts the matter entirely in the hand of the utility-

⁹⁵ Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories*, pg. 92. Sommerville also discusses this issue in *Political Ideas in Historical Context*, pg. 141

⁹⁶ Ibid.

calculating agent, and ensures that no obligation can exist without sanction. While this is not the place to explore this suggestion at length, I am a little skeptical of Tuck's conclusion. I believe that there is more to Hobbes' ethics than the calculation of risk and reward, and that obligation have something to do with education and internal conditioning, and not just fear and hope.

Conclusions

Natural reason can tell us very little about the nature of God, according to Hobbes. He keeps orthodox company in maintaining this. But I believe his motivations are different than those of the Doctors of the Church and the Reformers. The inherent vagueness and minimalism of natural theology is remarkably convenient for Hobbes' political theory. By restricting natural theology to the point where it can say nothing meaningful without the consent of the sovereign, Hobbes is building a theoretical bulwark against any dissent predicated on an independent interpretation of God's nature or intentions. I do not think that this theoretical overlap is pure coincidence.

I will grant that Hobbes probably maintains the belief in a God who is probably not personal, but who serves as the linchpin of physical laws, a mere postulate of reason should it attempt scientific enquiry in the first place. This God, if we could refer to it in those terms, is most likely not an object of worship as far as Hobbes is concerned, at best an object of admiration and wonder.

While presenting a position that is defensible in broad strokes, Hobbes is not always consistent in the fine details of his natural theology. This should not surprise us, if we assume that a perfectly consistent theological account was not his overall intention. I believe

that political concerns were more important to him than anything else, with the sole exception of unrestricted scientific investigation. Thus, we should expect to find Hobbes' natural theology confirming his theory of obligation. And we do.

Chapter 2: Hobbes and Predestination

“If Hobbes set out to ground the early modern nation state on the New Science, this was religiously motivated as well, for the New Science represented an anti-metaphysics.”⁹⁷

Many modern readers tend to assume that Hobbes’ thought is without precedent in early modernity, that his ideas “had just emerged from the earth like mushrooms”⁹⁸ without any influences. Certainly his lack of approving citations of other authors supports this impression. Least of all, it is believed, *theology* could not have any real effect on his thinking. One of the things I want to argue here is against this uncritical and historically naïve interpretation, by drawing a comparison between Hobbes’ thought and the account of predestination as propagated in Reformed Churches.

Hobbes’ relationship to the idea of predestination is undoubtedly a complex one. There are clear and sometimes striking resonances between parts of his philosophy and that of Calvinist soteriology, most noticeably in his theory of freedom and in his account of human nature. These similarities have not gone unnoticed in the recent literature on Hobbes.

For instance, A. P. Martinich observes of Hobbes that “theological concepts, especially those of English Calvinism, are an inextricable part of his philosophy, especially his moral and political views.”⁹⁹ He gives the observation a finer point slightly later on: “Hobbes’s determinism...is logically tied to Calvin’s doctrines of pre-destination and belief in the omnipotence of God.”¹⁰⁰ For Martinich, the issue of predestination is part of his larger overall argument to prove that Hobbes was an unusual, but “orthodox” Calvinist. Edwin

⁹⁷ Springborg, “Hobbes and Bellarmine”, pg. 510.

⁹⁸ De Cive, XIII.1, pg. 102. Mushrooms, along with many other things in the age before the microscope, were thought to arise *spontaneously* without “generation”.

⁹⁹ Martinich, pg. 1

¹⁰⁰ Martinich, pg. 3

Curley notes the overlap in several places in the editorial apparatus of his *Leviathan*. Vere Chappell also agrees that “Hobbes’s view of freedom and necessity was quite similar to that of the Protestant Reformers, Luther and Calvin among others.”¹⁰¹

Leopold Damrosch’s article, “Hobbes as Reformation Theologian” focuses on Hobbes’ debate with Bishop Bramhall, concluding, “Hobbes’ determinism, just as much as Calvin’s, represents an act of faith, though his faith is in necessity rather than in a beneficent deity.”¹⁰² Jürgen Overhoff also discusses Hobbes’ relationship to predestination in a chapter of *Hobbes’s Theory of the Will*, concluding that Hobbes “acted as an apologist, not as a zealot, of radical Protestant predestinarianism, and his interest in a public defense of Reformation theology was inextricably combined with the wish to render his scientific determinism acceptable to those who questioned his piety.” Hobbes gave his readers “a recognizable, and above all, credible seventeenth century theological defense of his scientific determinism.”¹⁰³

Thus, while several authors have done work assessing Hobbes’ debt to Calvinist theology on the issue of determinism, I believe that much work can still be fruitfully accomplished in this area. My goal here is to make these connections explicit between Hobbes’ *scientific* and *philosophical* doctrine of necessity and his view of human nature and the

¹⁰¹ Chappell, Vere. “Introduction” to *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. P. ix.

¹⁰² Damrosch, Jr., Leopold. “Hobbes as reformation theologian: Implications of the free-will controversy.” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 40:3 (1979), 339–352. Damrosch emphasizes how Hobbes’ use of predestinarian thinking was ruthlessly pursued, shockingly formulated, and perhaps really articulated in the service of his scientific beliefs, not an assertion of his form of piety against that of the Arminian Bramhall. Bramhall may have been appalled, but Hobbes was toeing the Calvinist line without too much digression or embellishment. As we shall see, Bramhall the Arminian would have found Hobbes’ articulation offensive, whatever Hobbes’ agenda.

¹⁰³ Overhoff, Jürgen. “Hobbes’s theological defense of his theory of the will” in *Hobbes’s Theory of the Will: Ideological Reasons and Historical Circumstances*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000, 129–176, pg. 160.

dominant *theological* opinion of his time, as well as to account for why these similarities are present.

The plan of this chapter is to explore these resemblance along with their attendant motivations. Prior to this comparison, it is necessary to offer a sketch of the doctrine of predestination as it existed in Hobbes' time, along with a discussion of its chief theological and political rival, Arminianism (I). Next I will explore biographical reasons that may account for the overlap of Hobbes' philosophy with predestinarian thinking (II). Next I will analyze the philosophical bases of the sympathy (III). The following section will explore reasons of politics (with an eye to his larger theory) that may have motivated Hobbes (IV). It is my belief that Hobbes had personal, scientific, political, and most importantly, philosophical reasons for laying out a theory of freedom and physical laws that resembled Calvin's theory of predestination, and that the overlap is not coincidental. While I believe that Hobbes drew what might be called inspiration from Calvinist theory, I do not think Hobbes was (or needs to be) a devout Christian in order to do so.

I.

The idea of predestination is central to understanding the intellectual climate of Stuart England and the Civil Wars. Predestination was a widely shared view, to such an extent that historians have referred to a "Calvinist consensus" on the issue.¹⁰⁴ To the Jacobean mind, Jean Calvin is the clear theological inspiration for these ideas, but Calvin himself was inspired by Luther, St. Augustine, and most fundamentally, St. Paul (especially

¹⁰⁴ See MacCulloch, Diarmaid, *The Later Reformation in England, 1547–1603*, 2nd edition. New York: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 60–65; as well as Marshall, Peter. *Reformation England, 1480–1642*. London: Arnold, 2003. Section 5.3, pp. 126–134

the *Letter to the Romans*). Calvin's successor in Geneva, Theodor Beza, also exercised an important influence by making explicit the doctrine of "double predestination" among other things. The theological movement known as Arminianism, and the predestinarian backlash to it embodied in the Canons of the Synod of Dort are critical as well. But the English also had their own idiosyncratic ideas on the subject. All of these various sources have subtly different accounts of predestination.

Predestination is thus a complex idea, and various points are disputed. Even Calvin and Beza didn't see eye-to-eye!¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, many basic premises were uncontroversial, as both making sense of God's unlimited power and as following from Scripture. The following summary should prove useful. It confines itself to a general analysis of the main themes of English Calvinism on the eve of the Civil War.¹⁰⁶

Loraine Boettner's *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* articulates, possibly for the first time in this form, that predestination can be understood in terms of the famous acronym, TULIP:

1. Total inability

¹⁰⁵ RT Kendall. *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

¹⁰⁶ I have relied on the following in making my presentation: Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, The Lambeth Articles (1595), and the Canons of the Synod of Dort (1619). The latter two texts are available in Bray, Gerald, editor. *Documents of the English Reformation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994. 399–400 and 453–478, respectively.

The reasons for using the *Institutes* should be obvious. Both the Lambeth Articles and the Canons are important Church documents for specifically *English* religion in Hobbes' time, and both documents exhibit a strongly Calvinist leaning on questions of salvation and predestination.

I have also consulted: Boettner, Loraine. *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*. Phillipsburg, NJ: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1981 [19], pg. 60.

Boettner's analysis is a classic, and I will also draw on his exposition, while injecting historical and theological analysis of my own to amplify and contextualize the discussion. Boettner's primary reference, as a practicing Presbyterian, is the Westminster Confession of 1647, a document which may also have touched the writer of *Leviathan*, and which contains much the same (basic) message on predestination as the other sources mentioned.

2. Unconditional election
3. Limited atonement
4. Irresistible grace
5. Perseverance of the saints¹⁰⁷

Human beings, on their own, are *totally unable* (**T**) to achieve salvation. After the Fall of Adam, humans became tainted with original sin, which renders them absolutely incapable of righteous action, or even of realizing that they are sinners. “Adam was made not only the father but also the representative of the whole human race.”¹⁰⁸ He was humanity’s best chance, and his sin left its indelible mark on the human race. If Adam falls, we all fall.

The Scriptures play a role in introducing the sinner to his or her sin; unassisted human reason is not up to the task, it is sheer vanity and pride.

Left to their own devices, humans would do nothing but sin. Humans are spiritually dead. They sin necessarily, but voluntarily. They inevitably choose sin, but they are responsible for it because they do so without external compulsion. This necessity of human evil-doing accomplishes two things. First, it makes the general condition of humankind worthy of punishment. Hence, God in his *infinite Justice* rightfully punishes the reprobate because they voluntarily earn His displeasure. Second, it prevents God from being considered the author of sin, or for being morally responsible for it in any way. To say otherwise would be to blaspheme God’s *perfect goodness*.

¹⁰⁷ Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*., pg. 60. TULIP, in the final analysis, is only a helpful reformulation of the five Canons issued at Dort.

¹⁰⁸ Boettner, pg. 77. See also 72–78.

Calvinists believe that before the creation of the world, God chose (“elected”) some people to be saved, and others to be damned (the “reprobate”). This predestination of saved and damned at the same time is commonly called “double predestination”. The number of elect and the number of reprobate is fixed, and encompasses all souls. There is no middle ground between salvation and damnation (no purgatory, etc.). A fundamental belief, thus, is that all humans beings are not destined for salvation.

God has foreknowledge of all events that will come to pass. This is a crucial component of God’s *omniscience*.

Humans are saved (“justified”) by faith alone, which issues forth good works, not the other way around. Humans can do nothing to merit the gift of grace which ushers in an abiding faith. Even this faith and the willpower to act upon it is a gift from God. Faith is given freely, it is not something that is owed to the human being or that could be demanded of God. Hence, all the elements of salvation come from God and God alone. To give humans a real role in their salvation would be to challenge the *omnipotence* of God. By conceding that humans beings are rightly punished, and that they are saved only by God’s free gift of grace, God shows the faithful his *infinite mercy*. Humans do not deserve to be saved, and the fact that any of them are is a testament to God’s mercy. By having salvation be decided before the creation of the world and solely on the basis of God’s free choice, we have the doctrine of *unconditional election* (U).

A further belief is that the death of Jesus was made to save the elect only—Jesus did not die for all mankind (another of Beza’s innovations).¹⁰⁹ Christ’s death was accepted by God as a sufficient sacrifice to pardon some of the reprobate. This is *limited atonement* (L).

Saving grace abides. Human will cannot resist the power of grace to transform the sinner, to literally *regenerate* him from spiritual death. This is the meaning of the term “born again”.¹¹⁰ Saving grace cannot be lost once given, although the elect will still be subject to the temptations and trials of their human nature, and hence must be vigilant. This, again, testifies to God’s omnipotence. This is *irresistible grace* (I).

Finally, the elect are supposed to be aware of their election.¹¹¹ This gave rise to a controversy between what are called “Experimental” and “Credal” predestinarians.¹¹² The former, many of whom called themselves the “godly” and whom history has labeled “Puritans”, believed that the elect could have clear experiential signs of their salvation (“experience” is root of “experimental” here), and that they should distance themselves from, if not completely shun, those not so marked. Credal predestinarians rejected that there were unambiguous signs of election, some on theological grounds, but also strongly for reasons of political order. A self-conscious elect could create a public disturbance on the one hand, and could lead the allegedly reprobate to abandon all sense of morality and order on the other. It is no surprise, then, that conservative thinkers like Hobbes tended to espouse the credal variety.

¹⁰⁹ See Marshall, pg. 128

¹¹⁰ See Boettner, 164–171.

¹¹¹ Nevertheless, RT Kendall shows the absolute anxiety that some of the faithful felt concerning their election, because coexisting alongside the sense of security the blessed were supposed to have was the awareness of some faith that was not enduring, or that could come very late in life. Antinomianism was closely related to those who thought they were saved and were above the laws.

¹¹² See Marshall, pp. 129–30

The truly elect, on this doctrine, will *persevere* (**P**) in the face of temptation, and can trust to their salvation. But “As long as the believer remains in this world his state is one of warfare.”¹¹³ He will be surrounded by temptation and wicked people. But “those who become true Christians cannot totally fall away and be lost, -- that while they may fall into sin temporarily, they will eventually return and be saved.”¹¹⁴

Boettner argues that the five principles form a systematic unity, with each part logically implying the others. He writes, “these are not isolated and independent doctrines, but are so inter-related that they form a simple, harmonious, self-consistent system”.¹¹⁵ We should be able to grasp the interconnectedness at this point.

Predestination struck many observers as harsh or unjustified. Even Boettner agrees, if we consider humanity’s sinful nature and future punishments, that “This side of the picture is dark; very dark indeed; but its supplement is the glory of God in redemption.”¹¹⁶ Obviously, the Catholic Church rejected the doctrine. But even on the Protestant side, there were dissidents. The most important for our purposes is Jacob Harmenszoon (1559 or 1560–1609), commonly known by his Latinized name, Arminius.¹¹⁷

Arminius was a Dutch theologian, whose works were collected in a book entitled the *Remonstrance* (his followers, consequently, became known as Remonstrants). His primary arguments were, “that election to eternal life is conditional upon good works in this life, that

¹¹³ Boettner, pg. 186. The Hobbesian resonance is clear.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pg. 182.

¹¹⁵ Boettner, pg. 59.

¹¹⁶ Boettner, pg. 80.

¹¹⁷ Bangs, Carl. “Arminius, Jacobus.” *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Ed. Lindsay Jones. Vol. 1. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005. 492-493. 15 vols. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Thomson Gale.

grace can be resisted and lost, that Christ died for all men.”¹¹⁸ He thus rejected the hard-edged and unconditional nature of predestination in the Calvinist doctrine, but not without provoking a controversy. The view nevertheless attracted followers at home and abroad.

The Remonstrants were condemned at the Synod of Dort (Dordrecht) in 1618. The Synod was the closest thing the Reformed Churches had ever had to a General Council. The English sent an approving delegation, and while the Canons of the Synod never became the official doctrine of the Church of England, they exercised an important influence on thinking in that institution for several years. Hobbes would have been 30 at the time the Canons were issued, and he could not have been ignorant of the controversy.

In spite of this, with the promotion of William Laud to Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633, an ascendant, but minority, faction of Arminians in the Church of England assumed power. Technically, the name “Arminian” is a misnomer for the English movement. English Arminianism adopted many of those fine points of theology repudiated at Dort, but had been doing so before Arminius had begun writing. Furthermore, English Arminianism was also far more concerned with issues of liturgy and church decoration than Arminius had ever been. Nevertheless, the name has stuck both with contemporaries and historians, and thus it is useful to contrast English Arminianism (simply “Arminianism” from here on) with the dominant view among both citizens and divines on the eve of the English Civil War.

Scholars argue that this shift among the clerical elites from Calvinist assumptions to Arminian doctrines was at the very least an accelerant (if not one of the principle causes) of

¹¹⁸ Chadwick, Owen. *The Reformation*. New York: Penguin Books, 1972. pg. 220. There is a long summary of the Remonstrant’s position in the Introduction provided to the Canons of the Synod of Dort, as well as what can be gleaned from the body of the text in the *Documents of the English Reformation*.

the unrest that lead to the Civil Wars.¹¹⁹ The Arminians insisted on what were commonly viewed as idolatrous church decorations: church rails, vestments, altars, etc. and mandated the use of the old Book of Common Prayer. Both of these moves brought the English Church closer to what were perceived as older, Catholic practices. A common perception in prewar England was of an incomplete Reformation, a Reformation that was slowly fine-tuning itself, but nevertheless still moving forward. Arminianism for many represented a step backward for many observant Protestants.

Hobbes was directly and personally engaged in longstanding controversies with John Bramhall, an Anglican bishop also in exile in France at the same time as Hobbes. Bramhall was an Arminian, famous for his temper (he died of a stroke in the midst of an argument) and his acidic wit.¹²⁰ His debate with Hobbes was not intended for publication, but it attained an intensity that boiled over into print. As we will soon see, Bramhall was to become a dogged pursuer of Hobbes, sniffing out the hint of irreligion and other vices in him.

There were state security concerns over Arminianism as well. In the context of an England constantly worried about a Catholic takeover, the Arminians seemed far too close to Roman doctrine to be trusted. Keep in mind that it was a commonplace at the time to regard the Pope as a *literal* Antichrist. England had been the subject of several Catholic-influenced aggression over the past century: ranging from the Spanish Armada (1588) to the

¹¹⁹ See for instance: Tyacke, Nicholas. "Puritanism, Arminianism, and counter-revolution" in *The English Civil War*. Edited by Richard Cust and Ann Hughes. London: Arnold Press, 1997. 136–159; and Morrill, John. "The religious context of the English Civil War." Also in Cust and Hughes, 159–181. Morrill famously asserts "The English Civil War was not the first European revolution: it was the last of the Wars of Religion" (176).

¹²⁰ For the circumstances of Bramhall's death, see Bowle, *Hobbes and his Critics*, pg. 116.

Guy Fawkes' "Gunpowder Plot" (1605) to the Irish Rebellions of 1641, so any paranoia seems justified. King James' attempt to marry his son to a Spanish Infanta (the so-called "Spanish Match" controversy) was viewed in a similar light.¹²¹ It was widely feared that Arminianism was the vanguard of a Catholic takeover from within. While Hobbes explicitly rejected the doctrine that the Pope was the Antichrist, he was fully aware of the prevailing antipapal and anti-Roman sentiment and engaged in it himself.¹²²

II

Of all the explanations for the intersections between Hobbes' writings and those of the predestinarians, the most trivial is the biographical. It is worth mentioning briefly, if only because it does seem consistent with Hobbes' character to hold a grudge.

In 1646, Hobbes was appointed as a mathematics tutor to the Prince of Wales in exile. We have reason to believe that Hobbes was only allowed to teach mathematics to the prince, as opposed to a wider course of study. Hobbes did not remain tutor for long, losing the post in 1648. There is evidence to suggest that Hobbes was not fully paid for his teaching services, either. Part of the explanation for this may be the meddling of a clerical faction personally opposed to Hobbes. In a letter from March 7, 1649, Robert Payne, an Oxford theologian wrote to his friend Gilbert Sheldon mentions a rumor that Hobbes "had lost the reward of his labours with the Pr[ince] by the sinister suggestions of the clergy as to

¹²¹ See Lake, Peter. "Anti-popery: the structure of a prejudice" in *The English Civil War*. Ed. Richard Cust and Ann Hughes. London: Arnold, 1997. 181–210

¹²² The entirety of Ch. 42 in *Leviathan* is essentially an antipapal screed. It is the longest chapter by far in the book. The rejection of the pope as an Antichrist occurs at L42.87–88/376–8. Hobbes positively lampoons the Papacy at L47.

their purpose”.¹²³ The letter implies that Hobbes was aware of the efforts against him. (The prince, for his part, seems to have displayed some fondness for Hobbes later on).

The basis of the antagonism was probably the publication of *De Cive*, which was received by the Anglican clergy as an attack on the *iure divino* (divine law) basis of priestly power, and instead argued that the basis of ecclesiastical power derived directly from the sovereign. Hobbes was aware of the hostility, and took the machinations against him personally. *Leviathan*’s increased rancor towards the episcopacy (among other things) reflects this emotion, and can in some ways be seen as a retort to the group that forced his ouster from the royal presence. The argument which placed clerical authority under the supervision of the sovereign can be seen as a rejection of Laudian Arminianism in general. Hobbes’ explicit adoption of a more traditional Calvinist view of freedom can therefore also be seen in this light, as a explicit reaffirmation of this theology in contradistinction to the incumbent clerical faction at the time.¹²⁴ But I do not think this animosity on its own is sufficient to motivate Hobbes.

III

Philosophically, there are at least three points of contact between the Calvinist picture of predestination and Hobbes’ views: (1) his scientific account of necessity, (2) his notion of human nature, and (3) similarities between salvation and the structure of the commonwealth.

¹²³ Payne, Robert, Letter 127, cited in its entirety in Pocock, Nicholas, “Illustrations of the state of the Church during the great rebellion”, *Ecclesiastic*, Volume 6, 1848. Pp. 161–175. The citation is from page 170. This letter is mentioned by Collins, Tuck, and Sommerville.

¹²⁴ See Collins, Jeffrey R. *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005, especially Chapters 2–4; Mintz, Samuel. *The Hunting of Leviathan*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1962. p. 12–13.

III.1

Hobbes' theory of natural science has clear points of contact with the Calvinist notion of predestination—rooted in his account of liberty, his notion of cause and motion, and his theory of the will. And while it seems that Hobbes, for the most part, has an independent basis for these findings, he seems perfectly willing to invoke standard Reformed theology in his defense when it proves helpful. Far from being contemptuous or dismissive toward religion in general, Hobbes' work demonstrates a thorough familiarity with the finer points of contemporary theology.

In this section, I will explore this overlap and consider the possible reasons for it.

Writing on human “freedom,” Calvin declares that:

God whenever he wills to make way for his providence, bends and turns men's wills even in external things; nor are they so free to choose that God's will does not rule over their freedom. Whether you will or not, daily experience compels you to realize that your mind is guided by God's prompting rather than by your own freedom to choose.¹²⁵

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes describes “LIBERTY, or FREEDOM” (he makes no technical distinction between the two) generally, as “the absence of opposition (by opposition, I mean external impediments to motion)” (L21.1/136). The physicalist and reductionist tendencies of Hobbes are clearly evident when he offers the liberty of water in a river as the illustration of his definition.

With regard to human beings, a free person is “*he that in those things which by his strength and wit he is able to do what he has a will to do.*” (L21.2/136) In other words, freedom consists in being able to do what the will decides, not the conditions of the choice itself. Freedom thus,

¹²⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.4.7, 315

is a property of actions or individual acts of will, not faculty of mind. It does not require the subject to stand outside of ordinary causation. By extension, animals are also free in this sense when they can effect what they will.¹²⁶

In *De Corpore*, Hobbes offers a general account of causation. There, he defines a cause (or “entire cause”) as “the aggregate of all the accidents both of agents how many soever they be, and of the patient, put together; which when they are all supposed to be present, *it cannot be understood* but that the effect is produced at the same instant”¹²⁷. If anything is absent, the effect will not be produced. Given the cause, the effect will follow. There is nothing at all to chance, as in the Aristotelian scheme.

A few paragraphs later, he claims: “For *whatsoever is produced*, in as much as it is produced, had an entire cause, that is, had all those things, which being supposed, *it cannot be understood but* that the effect follows; that is, it had a *necessary* cause.”¹²⁸ All effects, therefore, have necessary causes.

As is well known, Hobbes is a materialist: “For the *universe*, being the aggregate of all bodies, there is no real part thereof that is not also *body*, nor anything properly a *body* that is not also a part (that aggregate of all *bodies*) the *universe*.” (L34.2/261)¹²⁹ Hence, all psychic phenomenon are, to him, instances of matter in motion. Unlike the dualist Descartes, Hobbes does not need to keep track of two distinct causal pathways, nor does he have to provide a way to account for the interaction of two distinct substances, a difficulty that

¹²⁶ For an interesting discussion of Hobbes’ theory of freedom, focused more on its philosophical coherence, see Quentin Skinner’s “Thomas Hobbes on the proper signification of liberty,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 40 (1990): 121–41.

¹²⁷ *De Corpore*, in EW I, 122. In the original, the entire text is italicized, I have added italics for emphasis.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pg., 123; the emphasis here is mine.

¹²⁹ See also the detailed discussion in Mintz, Samuel. *The Hunting of Leviathan*. Cambridge: Cambridge, 1962. See especially, Ch. IV.

would bedevil later dualists like Leibniz. Hobbes does not offer a satisfactory explanation of consciousness, which the more subject-centered dualists seem at least better equipped to analyze.

Therefore, it is unsurprising that the will is no different from any other entity in being subject to necessary causes. It is merely a special case of a more general physical theory. Hobbes attempts to demonstrate the determinism of the will in a five stage argument. (1) Hobbes defines will as “*the last appetite in deliberating.*” (L6.53/33)¹³⁰ Actions proceeding from the will, he labels as voluntary. Voluntary actions even include actions under duress and motivated strictly by fear. (2) Deliberation he defines as the “alternate succession of appetites, aversions, hopes and fears” (L6.51/33) that are “continued till the thing be done or thought impossible” (L6.49/33). (3) Hobbes notes that since: “*going, speaking, and the like voluntary motions depend always upon a precedent thought of whither, which way, and what,* it is evident that the imagination is the first internal beginning of all voluntary motion.” (L6.1/27) (4) Imagination is defined as “decaying sense”, where sense (direct sensory perception) is caused by “the external body, or object, which presseth the organ proper to each sense, either immediately...or mediately” (L1.4/6). (5) This process of sensation results in action processed through the mechanism of the heart: “when the action of the same object is continued from the eyes, ears, and other organs to the heart, the real effect there is nothing but motion or endeavor” (L6.9/29).¹³¹ All of which is handled as

¹³⁰ The last appetite can also be the first, in which case we are referring to “spontaneous” or impulsive actions. Voluntary actions are those which follow from the action of the will in a trivial, definitional sense, but they are also those actions for which we are morally responsible. Even if they are wholly determined by physical forces, voluntary actions are still my responsibility, because the choice originates internally.

¹³¹ We can read “sense” in this passage as either direct sensation or imaginative recollection. It is tempting to read “heart” in the passage as the (strictly metaphorical) seat of the power of the will, but this is

gross, physical motion by Hobbes, perhaps more subtle and complex than most, but the same in kind as all other forms of motion.

Therefore, as regards the will, “to him that could see the connexion of those causes, the *necessity* of all men’s voluntary actions would be manifest.” (L21.4/137) This is one of the key assertions of scientific determinism, but it is also a critical component of the predestinarian account of God’s foreknowledge. To a Calvinist, God *can* see the “connexion of those causes” and confirms the necessity of their causation.

In spite of his ironclad determinism, Hobbes asserts the compatibilist thesis that “*Liberty* and *necessity* are consistent”. (Ibid.) Given Hobbes’ definitions, this seems to be unproblematic. When actions are executed after proper approval by the will of the actor, they are free, even if the will itself is determined by necessary causes. The definitions seem strange, but they are consistent with one another.

However, there are also (apparently) theological reasons at work behind these definitions. We can observe a similar tension between voluntary, culpable actions by fallen humanity and the totalizing nature of God’s power. Hobbes observes in a passage that sounds as if it could have been penned by Calvin himself:

For though men may do many things which God does not command, nor is therefore the author of them, yet they can have no passion nor appetite to anything of which appetite God’s will is not the cause. And did not his will assure the *necessity* of man’s will, and consequently of all that on man’s will dependeth, the *liberty* of men would be a contradiction and impediment to the omnipotence and *liberty* of God. (L21.4/137)

misleading. Inspired by Harvey, Hobbes has in mind the heart as a mechanical system like any other, that responds to sensation by pumping blood to the appropriate members. There does seem to be some deliberative mechanism, whereby the actor can be pushed one way or the other while she makes up her mind what to do. The effects of sensation are thus delayed and organized side-by-side, while they are weighed. Hobbes does not comment on how raw sensation is processed into a form where deliberation is possible, although from the use of “imagination” in the discussion he seems away of this issue. I thank Richard Cobb-Stevens for drawing this passage to my attention.

Hobbes is walking a tightrope here, one well-trod by predestinarians as well. He needs, on the one hand, to maintain the omnipotence of God, His absolute dominance over all things in his creation, even the human will.

On the other hand, Hobbes must avoid making God seem like He is the author of sin, which is universally regarded as rank blasphemy. In his debate with Bramhall, Hobbes was accused of precisely that mistake on the basis of his account of necessity. In his response to the accusation, Hobbes cites Luther, Calvin, and the Canons of the Synod of Dort, and he invokes “all the famous doctors of the Reformed Churches,” as well as St. Augustine to reach the conclusion that: “None of these denied that God is the cause of all motion and action; and yet they were never forced to say God is the cause of sin.”¹³² Hobbes places himself in good company here! Nevertheless, Bramhall rejected these sources as authorities, given his Arminian position. But aside from his invocation of standard Calvinist authorities, Hobbes’ unique reasons for maintaining this position are worth noting.

Recall that Calvin and other predestinarians blamed the reason for sin being the sinner’s fault (and not that of the Creator) on the corruption of human nature. God does not forcibly compel the sinner to sin, even though his defective nature makes it impossible that he will not. The lack of compulsion to sin exculpated the deity, because it made the sin voluntary. Sin is rightfully punished because it is evil. Calvin expresses it thusly:

man, as he was corrupted by the Fall, sinned willingly, not unwillingly or by compulsion; by the most eager inclination of his heart, not by forced compulsion; by the prompting of his own lust, not by compulsion from without. Yet so depraved is his nature that he can be

¹³² *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity*, pg. 80

moved or impelled only to evil. But if this is true, then it is clearly expressed that man is surely subject to the necessity of sinning.¹³³

Hobbes' approach is notably different, incorporating aspects of his theory of sovereignty and his negative theology. First, Hobbes writes, "Whether men will or not, they must be subject always to the divine power."(L31.2/234)

He elaborates on this as follows,

To an omnipotent nature, which cannot be resisted, both reign and dominion over the whole human race naturally belong. And this is the foundation of the right by which God afflicts whom he will and pardons whom he will, not, as many have thought, the sins of men.(OL31.5/236–7)¹³⁴

Later on he adds, "The right of nature whereby God reigneth over men, and punisheth those that break his laws, is to be derived, not from his creating them (as if he required obedience, as of gratitude for his benefits), but from his *irresistible power*."(L31.5/235) God's rule over humanity is not by pact or other form of covenant. Humans in the state of nature relinquish the right of nature to the (human) sovereign because their inherent equality and fragility renders them vulnerable to violent death. Federation is the only way to ensure survival. Since God is irresistible and invulnerable, it follows that he need never relinquish the right of nature to all things. Consequently, whatever he wills he does by right.¹³⁵ Hobbes makes this explicit in his debate with

¹³³ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.3.5, 295–296

¹³⁴ The Latin variant is listed in Curley's note 6 on those pages.

¹³⁵ There are obviously parallels in the Calvinist tradition, but they are tempered. The following betrays a voluntarist bias akin to that of Hobbes: "For God's will is so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever he wills, by the very fact that he wills it, must be considered righteous...But if you proceed further to ask why he so willed, you are seeking something greater and higher than God's will, which cannot be found." (Calvin, *Institutes*, III.23.2, 949)

Bramhall: “This I know: God cannot sin, because his doing a thing makes it just and consequently no sin”.¹³⁶

Effectively, all humanity remains in the state of nature with respect to God, and can suffer no injustice as a consequence. God is thus at the extreme limit of Hobbes’ theory of sovereignty, the only being who can secure obedience in the total absence of explicit consent. Hobbes goes so far as to maintain that all Christians are slaves of God, and this is quite literally true given the precise definition of “slave” in *Leviathan*.¹³⁷

Hobbes’ reading of the Book of Job in *Leviathan* (which occurs almost word-for-word in *De Cive* as well) attests to this. Job suffers not because of any sin, but because God wills it. Despite Job’s indubitable uprightness, God commits no injustice towards him when he afflicts him with torments. In response to Job’s pleas for an explanation of his predicament, God replies, “Where wast thou, when I laid the foundations of the earth?”¹³⁸ Hence, there is no crime when the innocent suffer at the hand of God.

We can infer, then, that because all human action is the result of God’s activity, that God causes even those actions which are sinful. This seems like a more honest inference than the predestinarian hairsplitting designed to avoid this conclusion, and it seems an obvious (although muted) conclusion for Hobbes to draw from these premises.

¹³⁶ Chappell, pg. 23.

¹³⁷ See Skinner “Hobbes on the Proper Signification of Liberty”, pp. 125, 126. Skinner cites Hobbes discussion at L45.13/443, “we are God’s slaves”. In his discussion of despotic dominion in Ch. 20, Hobbes compares slaves to captives, saying they “have no obligation at all” (L20.10/131). They are in a persistent state of war with their master. A captive who agrees to cease hostilities with his captor becomes a servant, and is obligated to obey. “It is not therefore the victory that giveth the right of dominion over the vanquished, but his own covenant.” (L20.11/131). Unbelievers, then, are properly slaves of God; the faithful are his servants. In both cases, they are defeated by God’s overwhelming might.

¹³⁸ Quoted by Hobbes in *Leviathan*, L31.6, originally from Job 38:4. Job is also used in this context in the debate with Bramhall—see Chappell, pg. 22.

Hobbes thus seems willing to bite the bullet and accept that, conceptually, God is the cause of sin, but also at the same time he argues that *speaking of this* is a dishonor to God and should be avoided. He in fact, leaves the obvious conclusion unsaid, and explicitly denies that “God is the author of sin” should be declared.

Hobbes’ Latin *Leviathan* also agrees that God is the cause, but not the author of sin. He relies on a distinction that his interlocutors seem to miss:

If they had been subtle, they would easily have discovered the difference between the cause and the author of a deed. The author of a deed is he who commands that it be done; the cause is he through whose powers is it done. God does not command that anyone do (or attempt) anything contrary to the laws; but whatever we do, we do by powers given us by God. Why, then, if God is in the cause, are we condemned? If you ask this, tell me why, from eternity, God has elected some, and rejected others, and how he condemned to eternal and most severe punishments those who had not yet done (or thought) evil, and who (unless God was willing and gave them that power) could not do or think evil? Tell me also whether it is not lawful for the potter to decide whatever he wishes concerning the vase he has made. Show me, finally, where Scriptures plainly say that all those who are excluded from the kingdom of God will live without a second death, to be tortured to eternity. (OL46.22/476).

God’s is indeed the cause of sin, but he is not it’s culpable author. That role devolves to the sinner. Hobbes does defend God’s right as master of all creation, to discard those things he does not love, like the potter in letter to the Romans (which itself resonates with Job). However, Hobbes does mitigate God’s awful rage by pointing to the merciful brevity of the lot of the damned: the second death that will end their suffering.

III.2

There is a considerable degree of overlap regarding human nature between the Calvinists and Hobbes. Both have what could be termed pessimistic accounts of human life, emphasizing both human pride, selfishness, and incompleteness. The Jesuit Thomas Higgins

remarks that Hobbes “was imbued with the Calvinistic notion that man is naturally selfish and corrupt and amenable only to coercion.”¹³⁹

Human vanity (or pride) is what drove Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit and engender the Fall. Pride is the characteristic of human nature, even in its highest expressions: “we can see that the reason of our mind, wherever it may turn, is miserably subject to vanity.”¹⁴⁰ Calvinists take a strong view of original sin, seeing it as stamped on human nature and not removable by baptism. Boettner, perhaps with a touch of hyperbole, exclaims, “Only Calvinists seem to take the doctrine of the fall very seriously.”¹⁴¹

Hobbes shares this strong notion of the place of pride in human nature, and seems to echo the moral criticism of it as well. In *Leviathan*, while discussing human equality, Hobbes observes that a rejection of this thesis is the product of a “vain conceit of one’s own wisdom, which almost all men think they have in a greater degree than the vulgar, that is, than all men but themselves and a few others” (L13.2/75). He also refers to the three sources of conflict in the state of nature: competition, diffidence, and glory, the latter arising from the fact that “every man looketh that his companion should value him at the same rate he sets upon himself”(L13.5/75–6), that is, very high indeed. Later Hobbes observes that, in contrast to bees and other social creatures, “men are continually in competition for honour

¹³⁹ Higgins, Thomas, SJ. *Man as man: The science and art of ethics*. Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1949. Pg. 228.

¹⁴⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.2.25, pg. 285

¹⁴¹ Boettner, pg. 72.

and dignity” (L17.7/108).¹⁴² Elsewhere, he speaks of the “Darkness from Vain Philosophy”¹⁴³ and the need to move beyond the ideas of the Ancients.

Leviathan, both in the Bible and as leitmotif of Hobbes’ masterpiece, is the “King of the Proud”.¹⁴⁴ A power so strong as to be monstrous is required to hold benighted humanity in check.

The emphasis on the vanity of human nature is perhaps more pronounced in the *Elements* and *De Cive*, a fact to which Leo Strauss drew considerable attention.¹⁴⁵ The *Elements of Law*, for instance, places Glory (of which Pride and Vain Glory are species) at the head of its list of Passions.¹⁴⁶ A few Chapters on Hobbes notes that “men by natural passion are divers ways offensive to one another, every man thinking well of himself, and hating to see the same in others”. (EL.14.4/78) *De Cive*, lacking the chapter on the passions of the other two works, nonetheless asserts damningly regarding human interactions that “By nature...we are not looking for friends but for honour or advantage” (DC.1.2/22). What people “primarily enjoy is their own glory and not society.”¹⁴⁷ Hobbes even goes so far as to say that “every voluntary encounter is a product either of mutual need or of the pursuit of glory” because “every pleasure of the mind is either glory...or ultimately relates to glory” (Ibid./23).

¹⁴² See also Strauss, Leo. *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Genesis*. Translated by Elsa M. Sinclair. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1963, pg 11. The argument occurs in all three statements of the political theory, in much the same form. In all three versions, pride and glory is the first difference given between the human being and properly “political” animals.

¹⁴³ Taken from the chapter title for Leviathan, Ch. 46.

¹⁴⁴ This is Hobbes’ paraphrase of the passage from Job 41 in L28.27/210 of Leviathan.

¹⁴⁵ See Strauss, Leo. *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, Chapter II, where he argues that vanity is the abiding and fundamental moral vice underlying Hobbes’ political philosophy, a fact that the geometrical presentation of *Leviathan* obscures. One needn’t subscribe to Strauss’s entire thesis to admire the extent to which he highlights the repeated references to pridefulness at the heart of Hobbes’ theory.

¹⁴⁶ See *Elements of Law*, IX.1/50–51.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

III.3

There also seems to be a third way that Calvinist soteriology exerted an influence on Hobbes' philosophical thinking, albeit indirectly. Hobbes' account of the movement from the natural condition of mankind to the commonwealth and his depiction of the might of the sovereign parallel the acceptance of Christianity and the almighty power of God, respectively.

The violence of the state of nature is akin to the eternal death of hell. One condition is the worst natural reason can imagine, the other is the worst a believer can conceive. Both result from fundamental flaws in human nature, flaws that remain insoluble to the unassisted individual. Both are resolved by embracing an all-powerful third party. Although Hobbes claims that a covenant with God is impossible in a literal sense, the acceptance of faith in Jesus Christ is similar to erecting a sovereign (or perhaps, even better, to submitting to a conqueror in exchange for your life).

The sovereign is a "mortal god" (L17.13/109).¹⁴⁸ Like the divine, he is supposed to be irresistible in power. The sovereign and God are both the objects of unquestioned obedience, without any reciprocal obligations or need to justify their will. In exchange for obedience, both powers grant life—commodious living for the temporal sovereign, eternal bliss in the case of God.

Obviously, there are differences, but the coincidences are strong enough to merit consideration in the literature. Martinich refers to this parallelism as "secular salvation" and

¹⁴⁸ I have removed the italics of the original.

claims that Hobbes explicitly “transmuted the religious paradigm and applied it to a secular issue.”¹⁴⁹ Hobbes’ contemporaries quite likely could have seen the resemblance, too.

III.4

To summarize, Hobbes’ philosophical position overlaps with predestinarian theology on the following points:

1. Both agree that all human actions are necessitated, even the will. If the will is necessitated, it is nevertheless not compelled, and hence, it is responsible for its actions.
2. In both cases, a powerful intellect could perceive this necessity (“foreknow” it in other words).
3. Both agree that any freedom from this necessity would be a challenge to the omnipotence of God, and both advocated a strong interpretation of God’s authority over his creation. In secular terms, Hobbes is advocating the supremacy of physical laws that admit of no deviation – ironically, this overrules the super-natural, e.g. the *miraculous*.
4. Both agree that human nature is flawed. Pride is a chief sin. The individual requires an irresistible power outside of itself to attain peace.
5. Both employ a similar notion of salvation in the respective domains, although Hobbes’ political salvation is a metaphorical recapitulation of the religious concept to a secular context. The latter adaptation does not preclude acceptance of the former model as true, of course.

¹⁴⁹ Martinich, *Two Gods*, pg. 271. See also the discussion on pg. 336 of the same volume.

We can now clearly see the parallels between the Calvinist account of predestination and Hobbes' deterministic philosophy. Hobbes and the Calvinists reach many of the same conclusions, and Hobbes seems to share many of the same theological premises as the Calvinist. Hobbes does, however, make significant departures from orthodox Calvinist theory. Moreover, he also attempts to find an independent basis for his conclusions outside of Scripture and religious authority.

What is the relationship between Calvinist predestination and Hobbes' theory of determinism? Is it one of direct inspiration? Is it mere coincidence or accident? I think we can dismiss the latter option. Hobbes seems to be too well versed in predestination literature to be unaffected by it. He intentionally employs predestinarian theology in his discussions of liberty and necessity where it is frequently unnecessary for him to do so. Nevertheless, Hobbes is not merely copying the tradition. He adds his own views that parallel, but do not ape, the theology of his time. Furthermore, Hobbes seems willing to seek out more than one basis for his views, to "overdetermine" them so to speak, with arguments from both natural science and Scripture (a process he repeats several times in his work)¹⁵⁰. It is probably overenthusiastic to claim that Hobbes saw no disjunction between his scientific theory and the prevailing Calvinist theology of his time, but it does seem clear that Hobbes' sincere philosophical interests¹⁵¹ were not completely at odds with Protestant theology, in fact, there are key areas of sympathy.

¹⁵⁰ Most notably in his discussion of the Scriptural basis for the natural laws and for his theory of absolute obedience to the sovereign.

¹⁵¹ No one seems to doubt that Hobbes believed much of what he wrote on politics and physics; it is his personal religious views that are the subject of heated debate.

Should we agree, then, with AP Martinich, who boldly claims that “One of Hobbes’s chief projects was to create a new theory for Christianity, a theory that would make it compatible with the modern science of Copernicus, Galileo, and Harvey”¹⁵² and that “Hobbes was a Calvinist”?¹⁵³ The answer to this question depends, in part, on whether Hobbes was a genuine Christian.¹⁵⁴

I cannot adequately answer this question here, but my suspicion is that Hobbes was not a passionate believer. Calvinist predestination represents a rigorous, internally-consistent formal system. Calvinism proper places an omnipotent God as the keystone, but we can easily imagine other forces occupying that same formal place. Hobbes seems to have done just such a replacement. Hobbes embraced the conclusions but substituted a different first principle. In this case, Hobbes seems to have adopted two first principles: the system of physical laws on the one hand, and the unquestioned authority of the sovereign on the other. In fact, all of Hobbes’ encounters with religion seem to have a political edge. We can consider such a dimension now, although not in this case from the vantage of philosophy proper.

¹⁵² Martinich, AP. *The Two Gods of Leviathan*, pg. 7. This is by no means a settled question even if Hobbes is seen as a devout Christian.

¹⁵³ Ibid., pg. 334.

¹⁵⁴ Damrosch, for instance, notes Hobbes’ affinity with Reformation theology but only to a point. According to Damrosch, Hobbes’ determinism is so effective it nudges the divine out of its necessity. See “Hobbes as reformation theologian”.

IV

While Hobbes' debate with Bramhall and the *Leviathan* argue for necessity in plain language, neither the *Elements of Law* nor *De Cive* make the case for determinism so strongly or explicitly. Why might this be the case?

Of the many reasons Hobbes could have given for this switch in emphasis, considerations of public policy are important. The specific doctrine of the Arminians and its divisive effects on English history are important enough for Hobbes to reject them in favor of an earlier, predestinarian thinking. The earlier books were not written in the midst of a rebellion grounded in part on religious friction.

In a striking passage from *The Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity, and Chance*, part of his debate with Bramhall, Hobbes draws a parallel between the latter's Arminian¹⁵⁵ position and the Roman Church on one hand, and the civil war on the other. After noting that ancient philosophers discussed much of chance and necessity, but nothing of free will, Hobbes adds:

Saint Paul...never uses the term of 'free-will'; nor did he hold any doctrine equivalent to that which is now called the doctrine of free-will, but derives all actions from the irresistible will of God, and nothing from will of him that runs or wills. But for some ages past, the doctors of the Roman Church have exempted from this dominion of God's will the will of man...And though by the reformed Churches instructed by Luther, Calvin, and others, this opinion was cast out; yet not many years since it began again to be reduced by Arminius and his followers, and became the readiest way to ecclesiastical promotion; and by discontenting those that held the contrary, was in some part the cause of the following troubles; which troubles were the occasion of my meeting with the Bishop of Derry at Paris.¹⁵⁶

A lot is going on in this paragraph. Hobbes notes first that the early Church did not maintain the belief in the freedom of the will, and cites Saint Paul as his authority. The

¹⁵⁵ Chappell notes this in his Introduction, pg. xi.

¹⁵⁶ Chappell, pg. 70. Chappell notes the troubles are the English Civil War. John Bramhall held the title of Bishop of Derry.

Roman Catholic Church nevertheless adopted this doctrine, apparently under the influence of pagan philosophy and without scriptural warrant. The leading theologians of the Reformation rightly rejected this doctrine. Hobbes demonstrates with great rhetorical flourish that it is easy to see why—if neither philosophers nor Scripture gives it any support, what can justify it? Yet Arminius revived the idea of free will among Protestants. In England, adopting the doctrine became politically efficacious for career-minded clergy (note the argument *ad hominem*). This led to strife in England between the predestinarians and the advocates of free will. This conflict was a contributing cause of the English civil war.

This represents a clear linkage in Hobbes' mind between the Arminian doctrine and the catastrophe of civil war, a clear reason to retrench his views on predestination, because that doctrine is *one* of the key disputes between the populace and the Arminians.

Conclusion

Hobbes' Grew up in an environment that made him familiar with the teachings of predestination. He was not tone deaf to the insights of theologians in general, and in the specific matter of predestination, he listened intently. Hobbes saw the resonances between predestination and determinism. His encounter with the theology of Calvinism bore much fruit. As Overhoff notes, it also provided somewhat of a religious smokescreen for his secular motivations. We will see Hobbes return again and again to a wide range of religious ideas, straining out that which he finds at cross purposes to his philosophical agenda, and retaining what is useful to him, often regardless of its pedigree. Such appropriation doubtless strengthened Hobbes arguments, and he was not ashamed of his borrowing.

Chapter 3: Belief, Revelation, Miracles, Heresy, Toleration

Before considering ecclesiology proper, I consider what might be called the sources of belief: the performance of miracles, the nature of prophecy, and the content of the Holy Scriptures. After examining Hobbes' argument for the supremacy of the sovereign in matters of civil and religious law, I conclude by looking at the subject of heresy from a Hobbesian perspective – a subject of much personal as well as intellectual interest to Hobbes. Hobbes' discussion of heresy detours into the territory of self-preservation as much as it addresses questions of political importance.

Hobbes' discussion of the foundations of belief is a blend of familiar epistemological and anthropological concerns for Hobbes, all of which entail political conclusions.

The Relationship between Reason and Revelation

Hobbes provides us with his vision of the relationship between reason and revelation at the very beginning of Part III, Chapter 32. Hobbes announces that he is going to make a shift from discussing principles drawn only from nature and reason, to those drawn from supernatural sources—the discussion of the “prophetical” Word of God, specifically Judeo-Christian revelation (L32.1/245).

While the shift does entail some different thinking, Hobbes cautions his audience that “we are not to renounce our sense and experience, nor (that which is the undoubted word of God) our natural reason.” (L32.2/245). Religious revelation will add things inaccessible to reason, but “though there be many things in God's word *above* reason (that is to say, which cannot by natural reason be either demonstrated or confuted), yet there is nothing *contrary* to it; but when it seemeth so, the fault is either in our unskillful

interpretation or erroneous ratiocination.” (Ibid./246, emphasis mine). We are not to leave rational thought, “folded up in the napkin of an implicit faith” (Ibid./245). There are two valid, complementary interpretations of the “Word of God”, the natural and the supernatural.

“God’s word”, in the sense of supernatural revelation, therefore will only increase our knowledge. However, some of the truths it adds will be beyond reason’s ability to explain. Nevertheless, nothing added by God’s word will contradict what we already know. We need to keep two things in mind about “God’s word”.

First, Hobbes clarifies what it means to say that God’s word can be “above reason”. He resorts to a version of the fideism he utilized in his natural theology, urging the skeptic to be patient, humble, and most importantly, *obedient*. Famously (or infamously), Hobbes remarks:

...when anything written therein [in God’s word] is too hard for our examination, we are bidden to captivate our understanding to the words, and not to labor in sifting out a philosophical truth by logic, of such mysteries as are not comprehensible, nor fall under any rule of natural science. For it is with the mysteries of our religion as with wholesome pills for the sick. Which, swallowed whole, have the virtue to cure, but chewed, are for the most part cast up again without effect. (L32.3/246)

So, when a religious truth is too hard for us to understand, we must accept it, and “captivate our understanding” to an authoritative interpretation.

As should be familiar, Hobbes argues that our judgment cannot be controlled, but our (public) words and actions can be. We are obligated to submit our will (not our intellect) to that of the “lawful authority”, and accept its interpretation of the passage in question. Just as the sovereign is empowered to decide all secular controversy, so the religious authority is

empowered to make declarations of this sort on matters of faith.¹⁵⁷ So for Hobbes, religious truths enjoy a certain independence from experience and reason, as they do not rely on these latter for *confirmation*, but only corroboration.

As we shall see a little later on, Hobbes will end up the “Word of God” in a restricted sense. After discussing prophecy, Hobbes will declare that the time of prophets and miracles is over. All we have to guide us as to God’s special revelation is Sacred Scripture. To put a finer point on it, nothing in *Sacred Scripture* will contradict our reason.

This means that anything argued for in the first half of *Leviathan* must be consistent with the whole of (the admittedly constrained space of) Sacred Scripture. Not only must there be a sort of negative compatibility between *Leviathan* and Scripture (where nothing said in the first part *Leviathan* contradicts scripture), but we can also see the philosophy of *Leviathan* (and elsewhere) in a positive way as well—as an interpretive guide to understanding the Scriptures themselves. Hobbes operates throughout the second half with this strategy. It may not always work, because some truths are above supposedly reason, but we can “humbly” attempt such a reconciliation. *Hence, we should expect principles in the first half of the book to be mirrored in the second half.* As I will show, this is indeed the case.

Hobbes’ account of revealed theology will be materialist and skeptical, it will take a dim view of human nature, and it will support his theory of absolute sovereignty. It will take the truths of philosophy for granted and read them into Christian theology, tendentiously at times. But Hobbes, in my opinion, is only feigning the pious reconciliation he attempts. His

¹⁵⁷ See xviii.11 of *Leviathan*, (page 114), where the sovereign is given the right “of hearing and deciding all controversies which may arise concerning law...or concerning fact.” It turns out that the sovereign and the lawful religious authority are one and the same, and that there is a limited form of freedom of conscience in Hobbes as well. Judgment cannot be coerced, but our actions can. We are bound to orthodoxy only in the latter.

real concern is not to dovetail Scripture with Modern philosophy intact and harmoniously, but to conform religion to his philosophy.

Hobbes will vigorously employ just such a strategy in his reading of the Scriptures, leaning back on his philosophical principles to manipulate difficult interpretive cases. In doing so, Hobbes will constantly expose and reject other exegetical schemes (Scholasticism especially), in effect starting from scratch with a new (and depending on who you consult, either a revolutionary or a heretical) perspective.

Belief and Faith

For Hobbes, all *knowledge* begins with the senses: “there is no conception in a man’s mind which hath not first, totally or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of sense.” (1.2/6). The use of words to describe our conceptions introduces further complications: the range of our knowledge is potentially expanded, but we expose ourselves to the risk insignificant speech, speech for which there is no sensory referent.

Science proceeds from sound definitions to certain conclusions. But unfortunately, we are not always able to begin at first principles. In which case, we trust to our own *opinions* or we believe in the opinions of another person. Recall that when someone’s ideas are grounded in “some saying of another, of whose ability to know the truth and of whose honesty in not deceiving he doubteth not, and then the discourse is not so much concerning the thing as the person and the resolution is called BELIEF and FAITH; *faith*, *in* the man; *belief*, both *of* the man, and *of* the truth of what he says.” Hence, “in belief are two opinions, one of the saying of the man, the other of his virtue.” (7.5/36).

This idea has an immediate application to religious belief, since the phrase, “believe in” is primarily used in a religious context. In Christianity, “when we believe the Scriptures are the word of God, having no immediate revelation from God himself, our belief, faith, and trust is in the church whose word we take, and acquiesce therein.” (7.7/37) All belief is a belief in the human sources that relay this information to us. We are not doubting God himself when we are skeptical about reports of the supernatural, because we have no privilege access to the facts of the matter to determine, in an epistemologically rigorous way, whether the facts support the conclusion. Hence, “whatsoever we believe upon no other reason than what is drawn from authority of men only and their writings, whether they be sent from God or not, is faith in men only.” (7.7/37)

Since no human institution is above suspicion, and many are downright suspect, this allows Hobbes to turn a critical eye to sacred Scripture while maintaining the appearance of piety. The move also smuggles in a deep, and in my opinion deliberate, skepticism about the independent authority of any sacred history or text. Any account will require a sovereign authority, here and now, to add literal force to the text, and give it currency.

The very terms of Hobbes’ epistemology seem to propel a healthy skepticism and to in turn require a political dimension of authority to settle these controversies.

Revelation: Miracles, Prophets, and Scripture

We can gather much information about God’s wishes from our natural reason, “which is the undoubted word of God” (32.2/245). But natural reason is necessary, but not sufficient for our understanding of God’s plan for humanity. A complete picture requires revelation, as we have seen. Natural reason is enough for basic ethical behavior, good

government, and unsophisticated piety. But knowledge sufficient to lead men to salvation requires something more.

We can acquire a *supernatural* understanding of God's message in one of two basic ways: (1) direct, first-order experience, or (2) by hearing about it from someone else. Of the latter, we can acquire this from the alleged source second-hand, or through further intermediaries, including the written word.

Hobbes talks as if it is extremely unlikely that one of his contemporaries will have a direct and immediate experience of God. He most likely believes it to be impossible. Before we can conclude that God has spoken to us, we must carefully consider a wide range of skeptical objections to the phenomenon, not the least of which is old Cartesian saw, "was I dreaming?"

Hobbes is skeptical on a variety of grounds of the concept of a private communication from the divine. He takes on the evangelical notion of "inspiration" as his primary target. In fact, three related concepts are relevant to our discussion here: inspiration, enthusiasm, and conscience.

Hobbes mentions inspiration is "called commonly 'private spirit'" (L8.22/42). For Hobbes, this couldn't create a clearer contrast between private inspiration and public reason, and this basic opposition will frame the argument.

He notes "It hath been...commonly taught *That faith and sanctity are not be attained by study and reason, but by supernatural inspiration or infusion*" (L29.8/212). The effect of thinking this way is "to make men think that sanctity and natural reason cannot stand together." (ibid./213). Hobbes, the rationalist, disagrees, "Faith and sanctity are, indeed, not very

frequent, but yet *they are not miracles*, but brought to pass by education, discipline, correction, and other natural ways, by which God worketh them in his elect at such time as he thinketh fit.” (ibid., emphasis mine). Hobbes asserts both the rationality of the process, but more importantly, he emphasizes the *publicity* of the acquisition. A purely private “inspiration” is immune to criticism.

Inspiration is commonly held by Christians to come from the Holy Spirit, so the terms “spirit” and “inspiration” are related in the popular mind. Hobbes obviously has serious metaphysical misgivings about such concepts. He writes

On the signification of the word *spirit* dependeth that of the word INSPIRATION, which must either be taken properly (and then it is nothing but the blowing into a man some thin and subtle air or wind, in such manner as a man filleth a bladder with his breath) or if spirit be not corporeal, but have their existence only in the fancy, then it is nothing but the blowing in of a phantasm (which is improper to say, and impossible; for phantasms are not, but only seem to be somewhat). That word [“inspiration”], therefore, is used in the Scripture metaphorically only (L34.25/270)

So inspiration amounts to being filled with air like a balloon or flowery language, nothing else. “For the proper use of the word *infused*, in speaking of the graces of God, is an abuse of it; for those graces are virtues, not bodies to be carried hither and thither, and to be poured into men as into barrels.” (ibid./271). All instances of “inspiration” in the Bible are metaphors, from the visions of the prophets to the visitation of the Apostles by the Holy Spirit.

“Enthusiasm” is a word Hobbes associates with historical, predominantly pagan accounts of demonic possession (L12.19/68–69). The Greek root expresses possession by a God. Thomas Blount’s *Glossographia* of 1654 defines enthusiasm as, “an *inspiration*, a ravishment of the spirit, divine motion, Poetical *fury*.” Blount defines enthusiasts as “a Sect

of people that thought themselves *inspired*, with a Divine spirit, and to have a clear sight of all things they beleaved [sic], *etc.*”¹⁵⁸

On the one hand, enthusiasm in the literal sense is clearly impossible on Hobbes’ metaphysics. There are no real demons, and there is no such thing as possession. The idea is the product of human curiosity coupled with human inability to discern psychological mechanisms at work. It is ludicrous at best, potentially disruptive. On the other hand, enthusiasm closely resembles the Christian phenomenon of inspiration. If the former is untenable and destabilizing, then perhaps we must believe the same thing about the latter. I believe Hobbes is operating with the two terms as synonyms. Hobbes seems comfortable utilizing examples from pagan religion to demonstrate absurdity, and seems often enough to imply that Christian rituals and ideas are often not much different, at least not where it counts.

Conscience is a related idea, and is particularly difficult to remove because it has evolved into a self-authenticating concept that fits with the vanity of human nature. Hobbes writes, “men vehemently in love with their own new opinions (though never so absurd), and obstinately bent to maintain them, gave those their opinions also that revered name of

¹⁵⁸ Blount, Thomas, *Glossographia: or A dictionary, interpreting all such hard vvords, whether Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, Teutonick, Belgick, British or Saxon; as are now used in our refined English tongue. Also the terms of divinity, law, physick, mathematicks, heraldry, anatomy, war, musick, architecture; and of several other arts and sciences explicated. With etymologies, definitions, and historical observations on the same. Very useful for all such as desire to understand what they read.* London: Tho. Newcomb, 1654. [Accessed at Early English Books Online: <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>]. The emphases in the citations are mine (except for the “etc.”).

Abigail Williams’ article, “The poetry of the un-enlightened: politics and literary enthusiasm in the early eighteenth century” *History of European Ideas*, Volume 31, Issue 2, 200. 299-311, brought this source and the entry on “enthusiasm” to my attention, although Williams misidentifies Blount as “Charles” Blount. I include a contemporary definition to give a clearer idea of the meaning that Hobbes had in mind. The associations would have been similar.

For example, in his discussion of “RAGE and FURY” at L8.17/41, Hobbes argues that “excessive opinion of a man’s own self, for divine inspiration” is a cause of the “madness” of fury.

conscience, as if they would have it seem unlawful to change or speak against them” (L7.4/36).

Given this ideological use of conscience, Hobbes writes that a chief “doctrine repugnant to civil society is *whatsoever a man does against his conscience is sin*” (L29.7). This belief is flawed because “a man’s conscience and his judgment is the same thing; and as the judgment, so also the conscience may be erroneous.” (ibid.).¹⁵⁹ While such a reliance on private judgment is all a person can have in the state of nature, matters are different in the commonwealth, where “the law is *public conscience*, by which he hath already undertaken to be guided.” (ibid., emphasis mine).

But Hobbes has a qualified understanding of conscience that should interest us. Obedience “concerneth actions and words, for those only are known, and may be accused. And of that which cannot be accused, there is no judge at all but God, that knoweth the heart.” (L42.80/373). Hobbes argues that it is a mistake “to extend the power of the law, which is the rule of actions only, to the very thoughts and consciences of men, by examination and inquisition of what they hold, notwithstanding the conformity of their speech and actions.” (L46.37/466).¹⁶⁰ Hobbes argues it is against the law of nature to accuse a person based on his private opinions. We will take up this thread later on in the discussion of toleration.

So, by way of conclusion, Hobbes has an embarrassment of reasons for rejecting the idea of inspiration. It is bad science, bad epistemology, and most importantly, bad *politics*. It

¹⁵⁹ See also L30.14/225, where Hobbes mentions disruptive subjects operating by “their own consciences (that is to say, by their own private judgments)”, making the connection between the two concepts clear.

¹⁶⁰ The reference to “inquisition” is surely not accidental, even if it is not capitalized.

is important to keep in mind that in Hobbes' day a chief form of religious disobedience was to deny the sovereign's power over conscience, and to cite private inspiration as the rule of behavior. This led to a range of behaviors from internal doctrinal disagreement in the Anglican church, to the Independents, to the unbridled madness of Antinomians, all of which represented to Hobbes at least, a destabilizing force in the commonwealth. This religious ideology made the reasons for acting occult, unassailable, and individual. Such an ideology was too dangerous to tolerate, at least in public.

By rejecting inspiration as a source for divine contact, Hobbes puts communications from the divine into a bottleneck. Only a small minority of prophets will receive messages from God. The rest of humanity will be subject to the epistemological constraints of "belief" (a concept shot through with difficulties as we have seen). This solution reduces the complexity of the political problem for Hobbes, by limiting the sources that can generate ostensibly divine inputs of potentially destabilizing force in the commonwealth.

Hobbes also constrains the nature of the communication, as we shall see. Messages from God will not be subrational, mystical infusions, but rather *words* – spoken directly or in dreams or visions, things liable to be written down. Once written they can be shared, and once shared they can be interpreted. (And not just interpreted, scrutinize to the point of downright *doubt*).

A real epistemological question arises when someone claims to have spoken with God. How can we be sure the experience is true? Hearsay, especially of the miraculous, is inherently dubious. "For if a man pretend to me that God hath spoken to him supernaturally and immediately, and I make doubt of it, I cannot easily perceive what kind of argument he

can produce to oblige me to believe it.” (32.5/246) In another place, Hobbes notes, “how a man can be assured of the revelation of another without a revelation particularly to himself, it is evidently impossible. ... And therefore, no man can infallibly know by natural reason that another has had a supernatural revelation of God’s will, but only a belief (every one, as the signs thereof shall appear greater or lesser, a firmer or weaker belief)” (L26.40/186–7).

I can legitimately ask: Is the speaker a messenger from God, a prophet, or is he simply mistaken? Perhaps even a fraud? If someone believes themselves to have had a personal communication from God, Hobbes argues that we have sound reasons to disregard their assertions. No one can force us to accept (in our heart of hearts at least) that something we have not directly perceived, clearly and distinctly, is true. Hobbes writes “So that God Almighty can speak to a man by dreams, visions, voice, and inspiration, yet he obliges no man to believe he hath so done to him that pretends it, who (being a man) may err, and (which is more) may lie.” (L32.6/247). Furthermore,

it sufficiently appeareth that in a commonwealth a subject that has no certain and assured revelation particularly to himself concerning the will of God is to obey for such the command of the commonwealth; for if men were at liberty to take for God’s commandments their own dreams and fancies, or the dreams and fancies of private men, scarce two men would agree on what is God’s commandment; and yet in respect of them every man would despise the commandments of the commonwealth. (L26.41/188).

Scripture, Hobbes writes, provides us with two criteria to discern the true prophet from the false. A true prophet (a) works miracles, and (b) only preaches in favor of the established religion. Both conditions must be met, for there are many false prophets who can work wonders, but who preach against the righteous faith.

What, then, is a miracle (a)? Miracles are “admirable works of God” (37.1/293) which cause a sense of wonder. Men wonder at things which are so “strange...the like of it

hath never or very rarely been produced” and such things that “we cannot imagine it to have been done by natural means” (37.2/293). The end of a miracle is to afford credibility to “God’s messengers, ministers, and prophets”, and then only among God’s elect (37.6/295).

In sum: “A MIRACLE is a work of God (besides his operation by the way of nature, ordained in the creation), done for the making manifest to his elect the mission of an extraordinary minister for their salvation.” (37.7/296–7, italics removed)

But, strangely, what causes the wonder of a miracle is relative to the observer. Hence, we have the curious (one might again say, “skeptical”) result that “the same thing may be a miracle to one and not to another.” (37.5/294) This depends on whether the observers have the appropriate knowledge to discriminate between objective conformity to the laws of nature or not. While I am not sure if Hobbes intended it, this passage has the effect of undermining confidence in the nature of miracles as a whole. The implication is that a well-educated scientist will live in a world with a shortage, perhaps even an absence of miracles. The ignorant multitude, however, will live in a world *abounding* with them.

Even further, Hobbes cautions that we must guard against false miracles, that is, apparent miracles that are the direct result of deception. There are many who can work wonders, but who have not been given a mission by God. Hobbes hesitates to ascribe supernatural power to enchanter and the like, because this gives mortals powers akin to the deity.

Humanity can already be misled without a true break with the laws of nature. This is no surprise:

For such is the ignorance and aptitude to error generally of all mankind (but especially of them that have not much knowledge of natural causes and of the nature and interests of men) as by innumerable and easy tricks to be abused. (37.12/298)

One person alone can wreak havoc, but “if we look upon the impostures wrought by confederacy, there is nothing how impossible soever to be done, that is impossible to believe.” (Ibid./298–299)

The existence of false “miracles” is the reason for Hobbes’ insistence on the second hallmark of a true prophet (b). Importantly: “how great soever the miracle be, yet if it tends to stir up revolt against the king, or him that governeth by the king’s authority, he that doth such miracles is not to be considered otherwise than as sent to make a trial of their allegiance.” (32.7/248). The motive for deceivers to promise their own unique path to salvation is obvious,

For he that pretends to teach men the way of so great felicity pretends to govern them (that is to say, to rule and reign over them), which is a thing that all men naturally desire, and is therefore worthy to be suspected of ambition and imposture (36.19/290).

Hobbes counsels us to heed the words of the Old Testament, “that we not take for prophets that teach any other religion than that which God’s lieutenant (which at that time was Moses) hath established, nor any (though he teach the same religion) whose prediction we do not see come to pass.” (37.13/299). We are to subordinate our private judgment to the “public reason” (37.13/300).¹⁶¹

The danger, for Hobbes, is very real and very clear:

For when Christian men take not their Christian sovereign for God’s prophet, they must either take their own dreams for the prophecy they mean to be governed by, and the tumor [sic: a swelling of pride or passion] of their own hearts for the Spirit of God, or they must suffer themselves to be led by some strange prince or by some of their fellow subjects that can bewitch them, by slander of the government, into rebellion (without other miracle to

¹⁶¹ Hobbes defines public reason here as “the reason of God’s supreme lieutenant” (ibid.).

confirm their calling than sometimes an extraordinary success and impunity), and by this means destroy all laws, reduce all order, government, and society to the first chaos of violence and civil war. (36.20/293)¹⁶²

A difficulty, one of many here, emerges. Only those alleged miracles which reinforce the current religious regime are valid, no matter how amazing and wondrous the effects we observe are. We must search for a naturalistic explanation for any “miracle” attached to a dissenting viewpoint. Furthermore, the sovereign has the absolute right to determine what is and what is not a miracle, which while not logically entailing a problem, seems to leave that discretion open to abuse.

In any case, as Hobbes sees it, the question of who counts as a prophet is of little practical value to his contemporaries, since he maintains that “miracles now cease...since the time of our Savior.” (32.9/249). No new revelation is forthcoming. All that is left is the Scriptures, which are more than adequate for the needs of the Christian. This is a critical point for Hobbes: that the time of miracles is over, at least until the Last Judgment. But Hobbes provides virtually no evidence to support this claim, although it dovetails nicely with his political commitments. Pocock highlights precisely this issue, that Hobbes’ thoroughly *ordinary* present was squarely presented as being between a miraculous past and an eschatological future. For Hobbes’s politics and his theology, “The present...is a time of remembering past prophecies and expecting the future which they foretell.”¹⁶³

¹⁶² The reference to Parliament and Cromwell here should be apparent. It is hard to see Hobbes as endorsing the new regime, as it is sometimes argued he did, on the basis of this searing passage!

¹⁶³ Pocock, “Time, history, and eschatology”, pg. 169. I differ with Pocock in that he takes Hobbes essentially at his word. I view the temporal division of Hobbes’ sacred history as an ideological device to pay homage to religious conventions, while effectively eliminating the miraculous from present consideration.

So in the place of ongoing miracles, we have the Scriptures as our reference. What counts as canon there? Hobbes is (apparently) no radical: “I can acknowledge no other books of the Old testament to be Holy Scriptures but those which have been commanded to be acknowledged for such by the authority of the Church of England.” (33.1/250) And “As for the Books of the New Testament, they are equally acknowledged for canon by all Christian churches” (33.2/251).

Yet Hobbes’ critical and skeptical tone continues into his reading of the Old Testament. Hobbes applies textual criticism to demonstrate that Moses was not author of the Pentateuch. For instance, in Deuteronomy, Moses’ tomb is described as lost “to this day”. This must have been written by someone other than Moses, “For it were a strange interpretation to say *Moses* spake of his own sepulcher (though by prophecy) that it was not found to this day where he was yet living.” (L33.4/252).¹⁶⁴

Hobbes utilizes the same methodology to conclude the same about the authorship (multiple, after-the-fact) of several other books of the Old Testament. Among his other conclusions is that Job may have been written by as many as three different people, and not as a historical account, but rather as an exploration of the question of why the innocent must endure evil. These ideas were both novel and unorthodox, they emphasize the human, historical qualities of the Scripture as opposed to praising their divine authorship.

On the basis of these innovations, Hobbes is thought by many to be the first modern, critical interpreter of the Bible. There are medieval Jewish practitioners of a similar

¹⁶⁴ The insertion of “though by prophecy” seems a calculated to deflect criticism of what was surely an outrageous idea to Hobbes’ audience. One might as well argue that the earth revolved around the sun!

approach (of which Hobbes was likely ignorant), but Hobbes was certainly creating a new approach among Early Modern Christians.¹⁶⁵

Hobbes insinuates that Ezra was responsible for the final form of the Old Testament, either as editor, or even as author. Ezra collected the books of the Old Testament after the return of the Jewish people from their Babylonian captivity. Hobbes dispassionately cites two passages from Esdras that insinuate that the law was destroyed, and Ezra reconstructed it by “inspiration”.

Likewise, the books of the New Testament can only be authenticated from the time of the Council of Laodicea, AD 364!¹⁶⁶ Hobbes observes that by this time, “ambition had so far prevailed on the great doctors of the church as no more to esteem emperors, though Christian, for shepherds of the people, but for sheep” (33.20/257). Nevertheless,

I am persuaded that they did not therefore falsify the Scriptures (though the copies of the books of the New Testament were in the hands only of the ecclesiastics), because if they had had an intention to do so, they would have surely made them more favorable to their power over Christian princes and civil sovereignty than they are. (33.20/257)

Hobbes concludes with an apparent *non sequitur*: “I see not therefore any reason to doubt but that the Old and New Testament, as we have them now, are the true registers of those things which were done and said by the prophets and apostles.” (33.20/257)

This leap should give us serious pause, however. Hobbes has spent the last several pages showing us that the authorship of the Bible is more complex than it commonly noted, that various authors intervened in the text over time. He has also further identified certain

¹⁶⁵ Spinoza’s approach shares much with Hobbes. It seems likely there is an influence there, although Spinoza was almost certainly aware of the medieval Jewish tradition as well. See Curley, “I durst not write so boldly”, 556–571.

¹⁶⁶ See *Leviathan*, 33.20/256–7.

historical choke points where the Scriptures were left, alone essentially, in one person's hands. After confessing that this would be a golden opportunity to distort the texts, he altogether abandons the idea. Curley draws a red circle around this disavowal of any wrongdoing.¹⁶⁷

I am sympathetic to the skeptical interpretation that Curley provides, but one needn't call Hobbes an atheist to see a problem here. Even if we accept that Hobbes is ignoring the skeptical implications of his own argument so far, he has certainly painted himself into a corner, so to speak. If we aren't to resort to Curley's position, we must say that Hobbes has disenchanted the Bible significantly. He has emphasized its human origins (while not precluding a divine influence) and its historical progress. The canon is not written on stone tables, it is the work of human beings. And human beings have provided ample testimony to their imperfections. We should expect the Scripture to need human hands to interpret it. We should perhaps expect some points of confusion. These conclusions are thoroughgoing and dangerous to a system of belief that places the Bible as the infallible anchor of belief.

This is why Hobbes rushes to plug that hole in the dike by saying:

But it is not the writer, but the authority of the Church, that maketh a book canonical. And although these books were written by divers men, yet it is manifest the writers were all endued with one and the same spirit, in that they conspire to one and the same end, which is the setting forth of the rights of the kingdom of *God*, the *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Ghost*. (33.20/258).

But what is it that gives the books of the Bible their authority? We can ask this question in various ways. No one, Hobbes says, disputes "that the first and original *author* of them is God" (33.21/259).

¹⁶⁷ See the discussion on 567–70 of "I durst not write so boldly". This is a clear instance of "suggestion by disavowal".

For Hobbes, this question of authority is equivalent to, “By what authority are they made law?” (33.21/259, italics removed).¹⁶⁸ Hobbes distinguishes three possibilities here: (a) private judgment, (b) the judgment of a commonwealth and its national church, or (c) a universal church headed by a universal sovereign.

He dismisses the first as absurd, arguing if it obtained, “it were impossible that any divine law should be acknowledged” out of the mess of human “pride or ignorance...or out of ambition” (33.24/260). The question, then, evolves into the following:

Whether Christian kings and the sovereign assemblies in Christian commonwealths be absolute in their own territories, immediately under God, or subject to one vicar of Christ, constituted over the universal Church, to be judged, condemned, deposed, and put to death, as he shall think expedient or necessary for the common good? (33.24/260–1)

Which question we will consider in the next section of this chapter, but it is important to note, along with SA Lloyd, that Hobbes is substituting a concrete, political answer where it might seem more natural to attempt an abstract, epistemological one. The former has the advantage in Hobbes’ system of being unambiguous, and enforceable. Lloyd effectively argues that Hobbes is arguing for what is reasonable as opposed to what is true, and “By transforming the question of what religious beliefs are true into the question of whose judgment we should take to be authoritative, Hobbes has raised the level of the dispute to a much more general and formal level.”¹⁶⁹ One, that certainly seems more manageable for a political theorist.

Stepping back for a second, there is a logical circle in Hobbes’ account of what is to be admitted as divine revelation. Scripture tells us what our responsibilities are, and we trust

¹⁶⁸ Hobbes is here referring to the public acceptance and observance of the Scriptures. Their power over the human conscience is God’s alone.

¹⁶⁹ Lloyd, *Ideals as interests*, pg. 110. The Rawlsian language is intentional both on my part, and in Lloyd’s writing. Rawls, after all, did direct the thesis that was developed into Lloyd’s book.

Scripture because it is the word of the prophets. But we only know what counts as an acceptable prophet on the basis of those same Scriptures. Curley makes a point of this in his argument for Hobbes' atheism. 'This wouldn't be the first time an early Modern philosopher was accused of intentionally putting a circular argument into his work!¹⁷⁰ I think Hobbes, also, was aware of his circle.

In summary, we can see how Hobbes' account of what we might call the "elements of faith" is heavily structured by his skeptical epistemology and by his authoritarian political theory. We can also witness his suspicion of human nature at work as well. But the principles extend deeper than mere parallel placement. The immeasurable capacity of humans for ignorance on the one hand, and fraud on the other, when it comes to the question of miracles and revelation particularly, demonstrates vividly the interconnections between Hobbes' anthropology and his epistemology. The corruption found by the former drives the skepticism of the latter.

Heresy

In 1666, Parliament, under the direction of Hobbes' once-friend Clarendon, threatened to launch an inquiry into atheism, with Hobbes as a chief target.¹⁷¹ The attempt

¹⁷⁰ I am referring, of course, to the infamous "Cartesian circle" in Meditation III of the *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Whether Descartes intentionally inserted circular reasoning into his argument for the purposes of undermining his conclusions, or whether he was not in fact committing a circle, I leave to better interpreters of Descartes. I do agree with Strauss that such schoolboy blunders are extremely unlikely in an intellect such as Descartes', especially *in print*.

¹⁷¹ See Tuck, *Hobbes: A Very Short Introduction*, 41–43. Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon and Hobbes had been friendly before the Civil Wars on the basis of their mutual royalism and (at least apparent) Anglicanism. Hobbes' return to England in 1651 (9 years prior to the Restoration), as well as his defense of the legitimacy of surrendering to a conquering power (L. R&C.6–8/490–492) alienated Clarendon and many of Hobbes' former royalist friends. The candid, biting, and unorthodox religious views of *Leviathan* did not help Hobbes' case one bit.

was repeated in 1674, 1675, and 1680 under the initiative of bishops personally hostile to Hobbes. They sought the ultimate sanction. Aubrey records it thus:

There was a report (and surely true) that in parliament, not long after the king was settled, some of the bishops made a motion to have the good old gentleman [Hobbes] burnt for a heretic. Which he hearing, feared that his papers might be searched by their order, and told me he had burnt part of them.¹⁷²

The matter of heresy, was, thus, to Hobbes of great personal import later in his life, after he had penned *Leviathan*. Much was at stake for him.

The question of heresy occupied much of Hobbes' later life, both practically and theoretically. Although Hobbes briefly mentions heresy and its cognates in the *Leviathan* of 1651, he devotes an entire Appendix to it in the Latin *Leviathan* of 1668. To this, he adds sections of his *Historia Ecclesiastica* and *A Dialogue between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws of England*¹⁷³ (both 1666), as well as a "An Historical Narration Concerning Heresy, and the Punishment Thereof" (written in 1668). Finally there is a short legal brief, dating from 1673, which also addresses these matters.¹⁷⁴ Many of these arguments overlap, but it is worth expanding our discussion here past the pages of *Leviathan* alone in the name of greater detail because sometimes the arguments are clearer in the other sources.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² *Brief Lives*, 153.

¹⁷³ I am using the *A Dialogue between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws of England* edited by Joseph Cropsey, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971. As per my usual practice, I am modernizing the spelling.

¹⁷⁴ Mintz, Samuel I. "Hobbes on the law of heresy: A new manuscript", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 29:3 (1968), 409–14. Mintz presents and introduction, followed by the 3 pages of the brief. This is another incidence of new Hobbes material being unearthed fairly recently.

¹⁷⁵ For convenience, I will refer to these works in the text as follows: *Historia Ecclesiastica* as *Historia*; *A Dialogue between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws* as *Dialogue*; "An Historical Narration Concerning Heresy, and the Punishment Thereof" as "Narration"; and "Hobbes on the law of heresy: A new manuscript" as the "Brief".

Patricia Springborg writes that Hobbes' works on heresy "were written to absolve himself of the charge that his was a heresy to end all heresies."¹⁷⁶ But while there are obvious personal concerns to attend to, Samuel Mintz cautions us that "it would be wrong to assume that his researches into the law of heresy were prompted by self-interest alone. ...Hobbes, fearful though he was of his life, viewed the danger to himself as an assault upon principles he had upheld all his life."¹⁷⁷ Hence Mintz, and others, argues that there is also a *philosophical* motive worth pursuing here.

Hobbes' conclusion regarding heresy, in short, is the following:

So as at this day there is no Statute in force, nor any Law in England whereby to punish a man for any matter of Doctrine in Religion, nor ground for any Writ to authorize such punishment but only the Ordinaries have such power to excommunicate¹⁷⁸

In other words, heresy is not a crime. We should not be surprised by this. Hobbes argues, "To err, to be deceived, to have unfortunate opinions, this is not, by its nature, a crime." (L.App2.30/527).

Heresy by implication is also rejected. Writing on the Nicene Creed, Hobbes notes that only explicit rejection of the creed was grounds for heresy. In general, this should hold:

For it is inequitable to say that the faith is denied by implication, and that someone should be punished for that reason. Is it equitable to seek a man's life by cleverness in drawing consequences? Or to put it at risk against adversaries (or even a judge) skilled in the art of logic? Shall the law, which requires nothing but obedience, take vengeance on faulty reasoning? (L.App2.52/533).

The same line of reasoning would be thrown up to defend Hobbes against the charge of atheism by implication, with perhaps the same self-serving intent.

¹⁷⁶ Springborg, Patricia. "Hobbes on Religion" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, Tom Sorrell ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 346–380. pg. 351.

¹⁷⁷ Mintz, "Hobbes on the law of heresy", 410 (Mintz writing). These principles had to do with the legal supremacy of the sovereign (over common law arguments and the independent action of the bishops).

¹⁷⁸ Mintz, "Hobbes on the law of heresy", 414 (Hobbes writing). Spelling modernized and Americanized.

A citizen cannot be punished in present day England for heresy. The most that can be done is to be excommunicated by the Church of England, which carries only a spiritual danger (and to an unbeliever, no danger at all). In order for heresy to be a crime, a statute must be passed that clearly specifies what heresy is and how it should be dealt with. How, then, does Hobbes reach this conclusion?

Hobbes makes his argument on both legal and historical grounds. His theory of law is informed by his theory of sovereignty. His account of history is colored by both his political theory and his account of human nature. In neither case is he simply arguing the law or the facts of history, but always at the same time he is informed by his wider speculations. It is also worth noting that Hobbes is no stranger to the methods of either history or law as disciplines. Hobbes both translated (Thucydides) and wrote (*Behemoth*) history. His legal argument, while clearly idiosyncratic in the context of the English Common Law traditions, is an informed one.

Hobbes' legal argument is best stated in the *Dialogue*, but the case work is succinctly laid out in the "Brief". Before launching into a discussion of the chapter of the *Dialogue* that deals directly with the law of heresy, it is perhaps best to review what Hobbes says about law in *Leviathan* and earlier on in the text of the *Dialogue* itself.

Unsurprisingly, given its title, the *Dialogue* frames itself as a discussion between a Lawyer and a Philosopher.¹⁷⁹ The Lawyer, following the lead of Lord Edward Coke, tries to

¹⁷⁹ It is not a very literary dialogue. Hobbes developed a taste for writing dialogue later in life: *Behemoth* and the Appendices to *Leviathan* are also in the form of dialogues. Even the verse-form *Historia Ecclesiastica* is a dialogue! All four lack dramatic power and seem to depict fairly static exchanges, but I think Hobbes was less concerned with theater than with rhetoric at this point. Hobbes is a master stylist, but an uninspiring dramatist. (And given the *Gondibert* controversy, Hobbes' aesthetic judgment may have been questionable in places anyway).

argue for the existence of a common law behind and above the statutory law. Common law, as one might recall, is unwritten law, a series of principles built up out of the series of judicial decisions over a long period of time. Statutory law, sometimes called “black letter” law, is written, positive law enacted by the legislature. For the Lawyer, as for Coke, the collective decisions of judges embody “an artificial perfection of reason...because by so many succession of Ages it hath been fined and refined by an infinite number of Grave and Learned Men.”¹⁸⁰

Hobbes argues the contrary, that there is no common law situated against the rule of statutory law; there is no independent source of law other than the sovereign.¹⁸¹

He concludes, through the mouth of the Philosopher:

I say, that the King's Reason, when it is publicly upon Advice and Deliberation declared, is that *Anima Legis* [Soul of the Law] and that *Summa Ratio* [Perfect Reason], and that Equity which all agree to be the Law of Reason, is all that is, or ever was Law in England, since it became Christian, besides the Bible.¹⁸²

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes makes a similar point:

A dialogue frames itself as an argument, with alternating sides that approaches an ideal model for teaching, and given Hobbes' interests in education, the didactic form of the dialogue is well suited to his ends. Hobbes definitely appreciated the value of the mode of presentation of his arguments when he began composing *Leviathan*. See Quentin Skinner's excellent book, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Work of Thomas Hobbes*.

Secondly, the dialogue model was a common style among Renaissance humanists and some early Modern thinkers, even Galileo wrote dialogues. Tuck notes this “interesting return to a deeply humanist practice” in *Hobbes: A Very Short Introduction*, 44. So Hobbes' had contextual reasons for adopting the form.

Finally, dialogues have the advantage of authorial obscuration. One cannot necessarily finger Hobbes as the author of a certain opinion, should these prove controversial. After some of his experiences with the responses to the English *Leviathan*, Hobbes may have felt the need for this kind of distancing.

I will capitalize “Lawyer” and “Philosopher” to make it clear I am referring to the characters in the dialogue.

¹⁸⁰ Dialogue, 55. Cropsey tells us that the passage is a close paraphrase of Coke's own words.

¹⁸¹ One might be tempted to pitch the distinction as the contrast between *natural* and *positive* law, as well.

This can be granted with some important qualifications. For Hobbes, the natural laws frame the issues for the sovereign to enact positive law. Natural laws only have independent, pragmatic force in the state of nature. They have no independent power in the commonwealth because the positive laws concretize, and for all practical purposes, *replace* them. The natural law is the skeleton upon which the positive laws of the sovereign are supposed to hang. They have no life apart from the flesh in Hobbes' theory. To give them an independent authority is to side with Coke and the common law (and the rest of the medieval natural law tradition, of course).

¹⁸² Dialogue, 62

In all courts of justice, the sovereign (which is the person of the commonwealth) is he that judgeth; the subordinate judge ought to have regard to the reason which moved his sovereign to make such law, that he sentence may be according thereunto; which then is his sovereign's sentence; otherwise it is his own, and an unjust one. (L36.11/177)

Hobbes' definition of law is:

A Law is the Command of him, or them that have the Sovereign Power, given to those that be his or their Subjects declaring Publicly, and plainly what every one of them may do, and what they must forbear to do.¹⁸³

(Compare this to Aquinas, where law is “an ordinance of reason for the common good made by him who has care of the community and promulgated.”¹⁸⁴)

An essential feature in Hobbes' account of law is its public promulgation. Promulgation gives law a public face. It keeps law from constant and disorienting fluctuation by disconnecting law from arbitrary whim. In a word, a promulgated law stabilizes expectations.

Coke tries to outline the common law criteria for the prosecution of heresy, providing five guidelines to determine the crime. But this misses the point entirely in Hobbes' mind. “The principle thing to be considered,” Hobbes notes dryly, “which is the Heresy itself, he leaves out; *viz.* What it is, in what Fact, or Words it consisteth, what Law it violateth, Statute-Law, or the Law of Reason.” Coke wants to argue for the criminality of heresy on the basis of custom, tradition, and precedent, a line of reasoning which Hobbes

¹⁸³ Dialogue, 71.

¹⁸⁴ *Summa* I–II.90.4. As can be seen, Hobbes and St. Thomas concur on several features of their definition. Absent in Hobbes is the emphasis on the rationality of the law and its aim towards the common good. Both of these are implied in what Hobbes says. The sovereign's reason makes law, and it is in his best interest to ensure the wealth and prosperity of his people. Hobbes and Aquinas differ on the availability of an objective standard by which to judge the rationality of a sovereign's decision or what constitutes the common good to which the sovereign must subordinate their decision. There is no such objective standard in Hobbes' decisionism.

repudiates, “but Precedents prove only what was done, not what was well done.”¹⁸⁵ Statutes are the only thing that counts in Hobbesian jurisprudence.

1 Eliz. [1] cap. 1 “revived” the early acts of Richard 2, Henry 4, and Henry 5, effectively abolishing the crime of heresy in England.¹⁸⁶ If black letter law is all that matters, then any heretic is no liable to formal state (or non-state/ecclesiastical) coercion, at least as matters now stand. Before we can tie all of these strands together, we must consider another, related issue.

Toleration?

One of the natural questions that arises from all of this self-defense against the accusations of heresy is to wonder where Hobbes stood on the question of religious toleration. If Hobbes is lenient towards heresy, is he tolerate of publicly-avowed opposing viewpoints on matters of religion? One thing for sure is certain, Hobbes was not John Locke, who maintained that: “the whole jurisdiction of the magistrate reaches only to these civil concernments [life, liberty, external property]; and that all civil power is bounded and confined to the only care of promoting these things; and that it neither can nor ought in any

¹⁸⁵ Dialogue, 129

¹⁸⁶ In statutes earlier than 1963, when a simpler system was adopted, the naming convention was as follows: year of the reign of the monarch (the “regnal year”), abbreviated name of the monarch, number of the Act. So 1. Eliz. 1 cap. 1 is the first Act of the first year of Elizabeth I. I use square brackets around the 1 to acknowledge that Hobbes knew of the existence of only one Queen Elizabeth.

manner to be extended to the salvation of souls”.¹⁸⁷ (Although there are some who argue that the two are closer in thought than has been appreciated.)¹⁸⁸

Certainly, Hobbes considers the relation of science to religious doctrine in more than one place, and seems to be of two minds on the subject.

We find in *Anti-White*, for instance, Hobbes writing the following words: “I say that the philosopher is indeed free to enquire into the nature and cause of motion”.¹⁸⁹ Hobbes does subject this inquiry to limitations, however. When the natural scientist happens to “stumble upon a proposition that is now held by the Christian faith and that seems to contradict a conclusion he has established earlier,”¹⁹⁰ the scientist must confess his lack of understanding. He cannot assert that his statement is *correct* and that Church dogma is *incorrect*, because he is then overstepping his bounds. He has “been allowed to advance as far as correct reasoning leads him” and must submit to Church authority.¹⁹¹ The public words and deeds of the scientist-as-citizen must submit to authority, as Hobbes has reiterated over and over again.

Yet Hobbes does not always see the Church as drawing a valid limit on science. In *Leviathan*, we find an allusion to Galileo, whom Hobbes met in 1634.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ Locke, John, “A letter concerning toleration” in *Two treatises of government and a letter concerning toleration*, Ian Shapiro, ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 215–54. pg. 218. Hobbes may have met Locke late in life, see Tuck, *Hobbes: A very short introduction*, 45.

¹⁸⁸ See Tuck, Richard. “Hobbes and Locke on Toleration” in *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*. Ed. Mary G. Dietz. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1990. 153–171. Tuck makes a historical argument that Locke and Hobbes shared many of the same policy interests regarding toleration, and may have met in person.

¹⁸⁹ *Anti-White*, Ch. 26.7 (307).

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Anti-White*, Ch. 26.7 (308).

¹⁹² Curley brings this to the attention of the reader in his edition of *Leviathan*.

And every day it appeareth more and more that the years and days are determined by motions of the earth. Nevertheless, men that have in their writings but supposed such doctrine, as an occasion to lay open the reasons for an against it, have been punished for it by authority ecclesiastical. But what reason is there for it? Is it because such opinions are contrary to true religion? That cannot be, if they be true. (46.42/468)

These religious authorities “neither by lawful authority nor sufficient study are competent judges of truth,” and this arrogation of power “is but usurpation.” (ibid.)

At first, we might be tempted to find an aporia between these two texts, one endorsing limits on inquiry in the name of Church doctrine, one endorsing the removal of limits against Church doctrine. To navigate between these two passages, we need to keep in mind that on the one hand, the *Anti-White* is discussing a genuine conflict between a scientific discovery and a Church doctrine, and the mindset of the scientist involved. The defense of Galileo, on the other hand, seems to be accusing the Church censors of incorrectly identifying a conflict where there is none. Moreover, the passage in *Leviathan* seems directed toward specifically *Catholic* overreaching.

So Hobbes accuses censors of taking the role of experts, but without the “sufficient study” to be “competent judges of truth”. Blinded by the doctrines of Scholasticism, priests stand in the way of the truth. Hobbes further accuses Galileo’s persecutors (as stand in for this mindset in general) of lacking “lawful authority”. The Catholic Church is arrogating to itself powers over science and scientists it only possesses in its legal domains. Hobbes implies that an educated sovereign, freed from the intellectual shackles of Catholic–Scholastic influence, would endorse the kinds of natural-scientific inquiries Galileo was punished for, especially given their practical benefits for the sovereign’s nation. Furthermore, recall that Hobbes maintains that there cannot be any conflict between the laws of nature and the Word of God; any contradiction is only apparent. We have recourse to metaphorical

interpretations of Scripture should the literal meaning contradict a confirmed scientific finding.

Hobbes, as both a practitioner and student of the sciences, seems to have come close to Kant's idea in "What is Enlightenment?", at least as far as scientific inquiry goes. In that essay Kant imagines a ruler speaking to his people: "Argue as much as you want and about what you want, but obey!"¹⁹³ One can easily imagine Hobbes endorsing this statement for scientists, especially those who would later come to be known as physicists.

But outside of scientific inquiry proper, Hobbes seems to be far less interested in promoting religious toleration or freedom of thought in general. Recall that the laws of Nature specify that it is the sovereign's uncontested right

to be judge of what opinions and doctrines are averse, and what conducing, to peace; and consequently, on what occasions, how far, and what men are to be trusted withal, in speaking to multitudes of people, and who shall examine the doctrines of all books before they are published. (L18.9/113)

Because, "the most sudden and rough bustling in of a new truth that can be does never break the peace, but only sometimes awake the war." (ibid.)

Yet Hobbes does leave to the subject a personal space. "In cases where the sovereign has prescribed no rule, there the subject hath the liberty to do or forbear, according to his own discretion." (L31.18/143) In fact, Hobbes counsels sovereigns to provide only the bare minimum of laws, because "Unnecessary laws are not good laws" (L30.21/229) and

where there are more laws than we can easily remember and where they forbid things which reason by itself does not forbid, men must necessarily fall afoul of the laws as they fall into

¹⁹³ Kant, Immanuel, "An answer to the question: What is enlightenment" in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, translated by Ted Humphrey, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1983, pg 45 [volume 8, pg. 41 of the Academy edition]. In the original, the text is presented in quotes and it is in italics.

traps, through ignorance and without any bad intention; and this is incompatible with the innocent liberty, which sovereigns are obliged by natural law to preserve for their citizens.¹⁹⁴

This is because “the good of the sovereign and people cannot be separated.” (L30.21/229). Laws are like hedges (or the banks of a river), they exist to guide not to restrict entirely.¹⁹⁵

As regards religion, recall that Hobbes argues that reason tells us that since “a commonwealth is but one person, it also to exhibit to God but one worship, which it doth when it commandeth it to be exhibited by private men publicly.” (L31.37/242). A commonwealth without *uniform* worship is a commonwealth without public worship, and exhibits no religion whatsoever.

But worship is an external act demanding conformity. It is far more difficult to control the patterns of our own private thoughts. While we are commanded to “captivate our understanding” to the observances the sovereign issues, Hobbes notes he does not mean here

a submission of the intellectual faculty to the opinion of any other man, but of the will to obedience where obedience is due. For sense, memory, understanding, reason, and opinion are not in our power to change, but always and necessarily such as the things we see, hear, and consider suggest to us; and therefore are not effects of our will, but our will of them. We then captivate our understanding and reason when we forbear contradiction, when we so speak as (by lawful authority) we are commanded, and when we live accordingly; which, in sum, is trust and faith in him that speaketh, though the mind be incapable from any notion at all from the words spoken. (L32.4/246)

Perfect control of our thoughts is impossible (although some is to be expected or even required), but perfect external compliance is well within our power. Mind control, on the model of Big Brother in 1984 is not on the table. The intellect is possibly too “slippery” for this to work, at least as Hobbes understood it, in the era before brainwashing.

¹⁹⁴ *De Cive* (13.15/151)

¹⁹⁵ See DC, *ibid.*, L21.1/136, L30.21/229

Hobbes argues it is natural and right for a person to seek out his or her own private opinions on matters of religion. “For who is there, that knowing there is so great a danger in an error, whom the natural care of himself not to his soul upon his own judgment, rather than that of any other man that is unconcerned in his damnation?” (L46.37/466). Elsewhere Hobbes reiterates, “it is unreasonable (in them who teach there is danger in every little error) to require of a man endued with reason of his own, to follow the reason of any other man, or of the most voices of many other men (which is little better than to venture his salvation at cross and pile).” (L47.20/482).¹⁹⁶

So we can say with confidence that Hobbes advocates something like a freedom of conscience, or freedom of thought, but only in the sense that it does not break out into public words and deeds. Which is to say, not a very strong account of the freedom of thought. If kept private, probably extending to the company of friends, thought is no danger, and should not be the subject of coercion. I might add, that what holds for religion, also holds even more truly for science. But he is walking a fine line here. Leaving thought “free” invites its exposure to the light of day in words and deeds. But we have no realistic alternative, as Alan Ryan (see below) would contend as well. In the privacy of our own minds, we are free to be damned.

Alan Ryan’s informative article, “Hobbes, Toleration, and the Inner Life” presents a detailed examination of the arguments for a more tolerant Hobbes. Ryan considers whether Hobbes adopts one of three possibilities regarding the “inner life”, or private religious belief: (1) an doctrine of absolute thought control, taken to its logical extreme involving

¹⁹⁶ “Cross and pile” is the equivalent of “heads and tails”.

brainwashing and programming, (2) a liberal doctrine of free toleration, or (3) a pragmatic position between the two. Hobbes, settles, according to Ryan, on the middle path, where we “conjoin private liberty and public regulation.”¹⁹⁷ In fact, Ryan thinks Hobbes is fairly hands off when it comes to private thoughts, “Security would be threatened by much prying, so much prying is condemned.”¹⁹⁸

Hobbes clearly sees the limits of coercion, because the sovereign power “cannot be maintained by any civil law or terror of punishment.” (L30.4/220) Proper education is required, education that teaches the sound, rational foundations of the sovereign’s power. Lloyd has highlighted this often neglected aspect of Hobbes’ thought.

Ryan’s approach is similar in many respects to my own, emphasizing the skeptical and political dimensions of a Hobbesian account of toleration, and asserting that “religion is a matter of law and not truth” for Hobbes.¹⁹⁹

But making sense of this latter claim can give us fits, as we have seen before. Ryan brings out the obvious question for Hobbes’s thought: If the sovereign’s power extends to all doctrines, what happens if the sovereign were to declare an obvious truth illegal? Hobbes does his best to isolate one person as the judge of acceptable and unacceptable doctrine, and by placing this person in sole possession of final political power, he ties that act of judgment closely to the pragmatic needs of a domain. But could the sovereign really deny something incontestably true, like the truth of $2+2=4$? This seems a difficult position to maintain, especially given Hobbes’ evident love of the precision of geometry.

¹⁹⁷ Ryan, Alan, “Hobbes, Toleration, and the Inner Life” in *The Nature of Political Theory* edited by David Miller and Larry Sidentop. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, 197–218. The quote is from page 208.

¹⁹⁸ Ryan, 208.

¹⁹⁹ Ryan, 210.

We must first be aware that Hobbes had no knowledge of propagandistic totalitarianism like that of Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, or 1984, and the idea that the sovereign might be able to make truths whole cloth would not be familiar to him. To Hobbes' mind, 2+2 could never equal 5.

Hobbes explicitly tells us, "arithmetic is a certain and infallible *art*." (L5.3/23, emphasis mine). Nonetheless, even in addition, "unpracticed men must, and professors themselves may, often err and cast up false" (L5.2/23) and a controversy may ensue. So the decision as to who is right in a controversy of this nature is to have an arbitrator decide what is "right reason"; that arbitrator is the sovereign. The Hobbesian response here must be that no longstanding controversy, sufficient to make humans "come to blows or be undecided" (L5.3/23), will be found in matters so trivial. The sovereign's influence is not over truth *simpliciter*, but over truth as the stake in a controversy of sufficient weight to interest the person of the commonwealth. It seems reasonable, at least in many places, to place the results of science (especially physics) in this domain of non-controversial thought.

Hobbes famously links science to human utility, "*reason* is the *pave*, increase of *science*, the *way*; and the benefit of mankind, the *end*." (L5.20/26) The benefits to humankind as Hobbes sees them are avoidance of the *summum malum*, violent death, and the promotion of commodious living. The laws of nature benefit humankind with peace, and are thus eternal laws, because "it can never be that war shall preserve life, and peace destroy it." (L.15.38/100)

The following passage from *De Cive* may also shed some light on the relationship between sovereign fiat, truth, and controversy:

...men's reasonings are sometimes correct, sometimes mistaken, and accordingly their conclusions and what they hold to be true are sometimes truth and sometimes error. Now even errors about...Philosophical questions sometimes do public mischief, and give scope for great seditions and injuries. Whenever, then, a controversy arises about these matters which threatens the common good and social peace, there must be someone to a judgment of the reasoning, i.e. whether the inference is good or not, so that the controversy can be stopped. Christ gave no rules for this...The only thing left therefore is that the judges of such disputes be precisely those whom God has already instituted by nature, namely those appointed in each commonwealth by the sovereign. (DC.17.12/215)

Much like Constantine's intervention in the language of the Nicene Creed, the sovereign steps into philosophical issues and settles them with finality only when the flare up and threaten the social order. Hobbes does seem to consistently maintain, at least on issues of science and natural philosophy, that objective truth exists.

But the set of ideas, doctrines, beliefs, etc. that are conducive to peace (or commodious living, for that matter) are not exhausted by these laws of nature. There is a doctrinal remnant left over that needs to be specified. Unfortunately, as we have seen, Hobbes' epistemology has difficulty in accepting the principles of revelation as indisputable. Unlike the other two elements of his epistemological trinity, reason and experience, there are no objectively and independently verifiable criteria for validating revelation. Hence, the sovereign *must* intervene to specify what is admissible within the commonwealth.

Ryan argues similarly, that for Hobbes, "truth and utility cannot for long diverge, and that where there is no question of truth (or the truth is impossible to ascertain) the sovereign must simply lay down conventions."²⁰⁰ Theology is just one such domain where axiomatic reason runs into difficulties, and hence "Hobbesian natural theology is extremely agnostic."²⁰¹ This leaves plenty of space for the sovereign to impose his decisions in matters of doctrine. Hobbes' emphasis on the minimal requirements of salvation hedges his bets, so

²⁰⁰ Ryan, 206.

²⁰¹ Ryan, 208.

to speak. The loyalty of a believer skeptical of the sovereign's interpretation is secured, because her eternal salvation, on Hobbes' account, is not jeopardized by potential inaccuracies in publicly-approved doctrines. One suspects the sovereign might even permit doctrinal disputes, provided it was understood only pride, and not salvation, that was at stake in the debates. His writings on heresy also support this claim.

Ryan also points out another, related issue: "Hobbes seems to be asserting both that what he writes is true and that it would be usefully imposed as an orthodoxy", all the while granting that he is willing to withdraw this claim should the sovereign rule against Hobbes.²⁰²

This is not the contradiction that it appears to be. Hobbes always preaches that submission to the sovereign's will is paramount, even in matters of truth, because the sovereign is positioned to gauge whether or not those truths are potentially disruptive. I think any reasonable sovereign would see such suppression of true ideas as a temporary measure until peace could be restore.

Hobbes, is claiming an exception for himself in the public domain. Of course, he doesn't want to grant his opponents "air time" in the Universities. The Schoolmen have it dead wrong, and shouldn't be given their public platform. We can all see where their ideas lead, says Hobbes. So there is no contradiction in pleading for special place to your own ideas, while desiring to see other ideas suppressed, as long as you are convinced you are *right*. Hobbes reserves the right to be intolerant in matters of science and philosophy, where our ideas can be checked against reality and/or built up from unshakeable definitions. Others can be convinced, and if not, they can resort to their own private grumblings.

²⁰² Ryan, 205.

Ryan's conclusion is that, "the sense in which Hobbes has principled reasons for toleration must always and only be that he has epistemologically principled reasons, never morally principled reasons. There are things we cannot get people to think, and where we cannot we ought not to try."²⁰³ I am largely in agreement with him. A good sovereign will furthermore give people intellectual leeway, out of his own self interest. When that freedom erupts into civil disorder, or even threatens to, the sovereign must intervene to decide the case, even if it means stopping the flow of truth for a little while.

Conclusion: The "Freedom" of a Christian

Hobbes argues that heresy is not illegal, nor can it be punished under the current law of the land. He grudgingly concedes a least a form of private freedom of conscience. How are we to square these elements of Hobbes' argument with his demand for uniformity of worship and total obedience to the sovereign?

Part of Hobbes' rationale against heresy is to deprive Church authorities of any independent claim to enforce belief. Only the explicit commands of the sovereign count. Only the sovereign can administer the law.

The discussion of heresy and toleration must also be seen in the light of Hobbes' advocacy for salvific minimalism. As witness to the strife that can erupt from doctrinal pettifoggery, couple with the ultimate sanction, Hobbes is making a plea to deemphasize the role of formal theology and orthodoxy to the Christian faith. Minimalism also serves to eliminate some of the anxiety over an individual's salvation, of course. But it also presents convoluted theological hairsplitting as unnecessary, even counter-productive, especially when

²⁰³ Ryan, 217.

it is accompanied by the sword and the stake. It undercuts the potential threat of a clever or charismatic thinker being able to sway the popular imagination.

By arguing against heresy, Hobbes is more properly arguing against the traditional requirement of orthodoxy, at least as far as certain arcane discussions. This does not change the need for the sovereign to decide appropriate words and deeds for worship, nor does it mean that the sovereign cannot ban certain counterproductive opinions. It does loosen some of the bonds on belief, and hopefully lubricates the performance of the polity.

Hobbes is keenly aware of the limits of force to inculcate belief. In the *Historia*, Hobbes²⁰⁴ writes

If once thy Brother from the Gospel stray,
Instruct, and gently lead him in the Way;
All tender Marks of Love, and Duty, show;
No lasting Converts from Compulsion flow (*Hist. Eccl.*, 90)

I think this verse neatly sums up Hobbes' attitude toward doctrinal disputes and violence. In the Appendix to the Latin *Leviathan*, Hobbes renders a similar sentiment in prose thusly, "no one is accepted by Christ who has been compelled to him by fear of death." (L.App2.66/537).

Deemphasizing the gravity of heresy, as with almost every one of Hobbes' controversial opinions, has irenic intent.

²⁰⁴ It seems that the translator of the poem was not Hobbes himself, but I will ascribe the verses to him. His Latin original was at least the prototype for the expression in English.

Chapter 4: Hobbes' Idiosyncratic Eschatology

Hobbes' retelling of the Christian story of the end times, his eschatology, is idiosyncratic. Although it has precedents, as we shall see, it is a unique hybrid of his philosophical concerns and Christian Scripture. Hobbes presents an eschatology that is at once brutally materialistic and authoritarian, while at the same time claiming to be loyal to Scripture alone. JGA Pocock calls it a "political eschatology" and Jürgen Overhoff refers to it as a "materialist eschatology", each emphasizing their favorite aspects of Hobbes' apocalyptic vision, both of which are borne out by the text.²⁰⁵

Not only is this distinctive vision of the end times one of Hobbes' most original contributions to theology in *Leviathan*, it is one of his most controversial. Hobbes anticipated at least some of this controversy, and alludes in several places to the "novelty" of his doctrine.²⁰⁶ As an illustration of how shocking his account was to his contemporaries, consider the third Appendix to *Leviathan*. Written in 1668, it was intended as a defense of certain "paradoxes" discovered by his readers in the 1651 manuscript. The third Appendix defends Hobbes' eschatological position four times. Considering that the total objections Hobbes addresses in the Appendix number only thirteen, nearly a *third* of them concern eschatological themes!²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Insert references.

²⁰⁶ See the references to the ongoing civil war in 38.2 and 38.5. Hobbes advances his theory of eternal life in the uncensored context of the civil war, and claims he will withdraw these doctrines if they are repugnant to the final victor. He writes "the points of doctrine concerning the kingdom of God have so great an influence on the kingdom of man, as not to be determined but by them that under God have the sovereign power." (38.5/305) In the same place, he directly refers to his doctrines as a "novelty".

²⁰⁷ The four issues are: the belief in ghosts, the denial of the independence of the soul from the body, earthly salvation, and the nature of hell.

Leviathan marks also a significant departure from Hobbes' theological approaches in his earlier works, *Elements of Law* and *De Cive*. The latter touched on religion, but left eschatology more or less alone, they maintained a more orthodox tone. The strictly eschatological writings of *Leviathan* nearly outstrips the *total* theological discussion in the earlier works. But it isn't just the content of Hobbes' eschatology that changes. Hobbes' *tone* also undergoes a transformation in *Leviathan*. Both *De Cive* and the *Elements* were conciliatory and framed in neutral language. *Leviathan* is sarcastic, mocking, in a word, "combative".²⁰⁸

Hobbes was perhaps emboldened by the near-total lack of censorship in England at the time, and the lack of any strong ecclesiastical authority capable of prosecuting him for heresy. This explains the opportunity for the change, but not its true motive. There are systematic reasons for Hobbes to embrace many of his eschatological views.²⁰⁹ Hobbes' philosophical commitments require him to read the Christian eschatological tradition in the way he does in *Leviathan*. He held his tongue in his earlier political theory, perhaps partly in the interests of personal security, but primarily because his work had not yet evolved to the point where a radical reconstruction of the orthodox eschatology was seen to be necessary.

Essential to this discussion is first a presentation of Hobbes' eschatological vision of the soul, heaven and hell, and salvation. This will be followed by a section that analyzes this vision in terms of its historical precedents and philosophical motivations. Hobbes' primary methodology throughout parts III and IV is to argue on the basis of Scripture alone,

²⁰⁸ Johnston, "Hobbes's mortalism", pg. 660.

²⁰⁹ See, for instance, David Johnston's argument in "Hobbes's mortalism" where he argues that Hobbes' eschatological conclusions were the outgrowth of difficulties in his political theory arising from the religious conflicts of the English Civil Wars, difficulties that had not been apparent when he was writing EL or DC.

preferring only to analyze Scriptural content philosophically, rather than draw on wider sources for his arguments.

I. Hobbes' Eschatology

1. The soul

Traditionally, the soul is understood in Christianity as an incorporeal spirit. As a necessary preface to his discussion of the soul, Hobbes first insists that any use of the word “spirit” in Scripture is either simply metaphorical, or it refers to one of two things: “a subtle, fluid, and invisible body, or a ghost, or other idol or phantasm of the imagination.” (L34.3/262). The former is a gaseous entity, but the latter is a cognitive error. The Schoolmen, in insisting on the incorporeality of spirit, are guilty of insignificant speech. To Hobbes, they are either incurably stupid, or are exploiting that absurdity for political ends.²¹⁰

The notion of “inspiration” is also related to these concepts. God is said to inspire (literally, blow into) life in Adam, and the Holy Spirit is said to inspire faith, etc. Inspiration must be a literal wind, or it must be interpreted metaphorically for Hobbes.

It follows that if the soul is a spirit, it is a material thing. Hobbes' account of the soul is thus free of any insubstantial elements. But Hobbes goes further, the soul is not just material it is dependent on the body, or else indistinguishable from it. He writes, “The *soul*, in Scripture, signifieth always either the life or the living creature; and the body and soul jointly, the *body alive*.” (L44.15/419).

²¹⁰ This will be covered in detail when we turn to Ecclesiology in the next section. Briefly, the doctrine of ghosts serves to perpetuate the power of the priesthood, by emphasizing their interventions on behalf of souls in purgatory and through their power to perform exorcisms.

If the soul cannot be separated from the body, Hobbes thinks that it cannot be naturally immortal. He argues, “That the soul of man is in its own nature eternal, and a living creature independent on the body...is a doctrine not apparent in Scripture.” (L38.4/304) Hobbes approvingly cites Job 14:7 (“man dieth, and wasteth away, yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?”) and 14:12 (“Man lieth down, and riseth not, till the heavens be no more.”) to provide evidence that men are by nature doomed to nonexistence after they die, until the Final Judgment.

Despite clear and plain testimony of Scripture as to the absolute dependence of life on the power of God, “the doctrine is now, and hath been a longtime far otherwise: namely, that every man hath eternity of life by nature, inasmuch as his soul is immortal...and consequently, not only the faithful and righteous, but also the wicked and the heathen, shall enjoy eternal life, without any death at all, much less a second, and everlasting death.” (L44.14/418–19) . Hobbes argues on the contrary: “the souls of the faithful are, not of their own nature, but by God’s special grace, to remain in their bodies from the resurrection to all eternity” (L44.15/419). If it were not for divine intervention into the order of things, the dead would remain lifeless for all eternity.

At the final judgment, according to Hobbes, humans are raised from the dead to stand judgment. That the power to do this should come from God directly, as opposed to originating in the native power of the soul, should not surprise us: “For supposing that when a man dies, there remaineth nothing of him but his carcass, cannot God, that raised

inanimate dust and clay into a living creature by his word, easily raise a dead carcass to life, and continue him alive forever, or make him die again, by another word?” (L44/15/419).²¹¹

If Scripture is not the source of the doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul, what is? Hobbes asserts it arises from “contagion of the demonology of the Greeks, of an opinion that the souls of men were substances distinct from their bodies, and therefore that when the body was dead, the soul of every man (whether godly or wicked) must subsist somewhere by virtue of its own nature (without acknowledging therein any supernatural gift of God)” (L44.16/420).

By uncritically accepting that souls were independent of the body, Christian scholars struggled with the question of *where* the soul went after death, in effect being bound by a *petitio principii*. Among other things, this led to the invention of Purgatory.

This kind of doctrine, which rejects the natural immortality of the soul, has come to be known as “mortalism”. There are three basic variants of the idea: annihilationism, psychopannychism, and thnetopsychism.²¹² Annihilationists taught the total destruction of the person at death, with salvation being only *in* this life through a freedom from sin. Psychopannychists taught that the soul “slept” until the resurrection. In other words, it persisted as a substance, but had no conscious thought in the intermediate period. Thnetopsychists taught that the soul was indistinguishable from the body, or life, and that death was complete until the resurrection. (Hobbes falls squarely into the latter camp, and

²¹¹ Elsewhere he repeats nearly the same argument: “For God that could give a life to a piece of clay, hath the same power to give life to a dead man, and renew his inanimate and rotten carcass, into a glorious, spiritual, and immortal body.” (L44.32/431–2).

²¹² See Burns, Norman T. *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972, pgs. 13–18. Burns’ account is the gold standard, and all of the secondary literature on Hobbes’ mortalism consults it. My discussion is likewise indebted to this important book. Burns specifically discusses both Hobbes and Overton as mortalists.

can safely be referred to as a thnetopsychist). Mortalism of all stripes, as Norman Burns notes, was a thoroughly *Scriptural* movement, not merely a reasoning from facts of science or other natural evidence, but always with one eye on the Biblical texts. This applies to Hobbes as well, he argues – “the fact remains that when Hobbes argued from Scripture he argued like a Protestant, maintaining that Scripture itself and not reason was his supreme authority.”²¹³

While it was never an official doctrine of a major sect, or even especially popular, it did gain a number of adherents in Hobbes’ time, notably John Milton, and had a long history in Christian thought. Burns refers to it as “a thoroughly unorthodox but quite unoriginal idea” for Christians of the 17th Century.²¹⁴ Many of the minor Churches of the so-called Radical Reformation had ideas of this sort.²¹⁵ Even Martin Luther was a psychopannichist, and wrote in support of soul-sleeping, although he did not insist on it in his debates with other theologians, and Lutherans did not adopt the idea.²¹⁶

Mortalism was rejected as heresy by mainstream churches, and it was associated with the radical “Anabaptist” movement.²¹⁷ It was condemned for Roman Catholics by the Fifth Lateran council: “we condemn and reject all those who insist that the intellectual soul is mortal...and those who suggest doubts on this topic. For the soul not only truly exists of

²¹³ Ibid., pg. 184.

²¹⁴ Ibid., pg. 1.

²¹⁵ See GH Williams, *The Radical Reformation*. (Page?)

²¹⁶ See Burns, *Christian Mortalism*, pgs. 27–33 . Luther saw the ideas as useful in defeating doctrines like the intercession of saints and purgatory.

²¹⁷ Luther’s personal position was all but forgotten, and the notion of mortalism was only associated with religious radicals. “Anabaptist” is a general terms of abuse for any non-standard Christian at the time. See Burns, *ibid.*

itself and essentially as the form of the human body...but it is also immortal”²¹⁸ The Reformed Churches agreed with Rome on this point as well: Jean Calvin wrote *Psychopannychia* in 1542, specifically repudiating both the doctrines of soul-sleeping and thnetopsychism.²¹⁹

More germane to the English context, and probably under Calvin’s influence, Article 40 of the 42 *Articles* of 1553 spoke against the doctrines: “They which say that the souls of such as depart hence do sleep...or affirm that the souls die with the body, and at the last day shall be raised up with the same, do utterly dissent from the right belief declared unto us in Holy Scripture.”²²⁰ The Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647 concurred: “The bodies of men after death return to dust and see corruption, but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them”.²²¹ Hobbes, therefore, must have known he was swimming upstream against well-established doctrine when he embraced the doctrine of the mortality of the soul. He surely would have been aware of the radical associations of this doctrine as well as its unpopularity. Yet he held to it, a measure of its apparent harmony with his system.

2. Heaven and Hell

As might be expected, Hobbes does not offer us a traditional account of heaven or hell either. Hobbes views both as being on earth, with the elect and the reprobate inhabiting

²¹⁸ Text of session 8 of the Council, December 19, 1513. Available on the internet: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Councils/ecum18.htm> [.]

²¹⁹ In fact, Calvin is credited with inventing the term. Calvin refrained from attacking Luther in his arguments. See Burns, op cit.

²²⁰ Documents of the English Reformation, 309–310. This article was omitted in the revisions of 1563 and 1571, the editors of suggest it was because these issues were “felt to be no longer matters of controversy.” (284).

²²¹ Ibid, 511. Article 32 of the Confession. (Thanks to Overhoff and Johnston for drawing these passages to my attention).

human bodies. The bodies of the saints are refashioned into immortal vessels, while the damned retain their mortal flesh, and die a second death.

Hobbes' first step in making his case for an earthly afterlife for the saved is to argue that the term "Kingdom of God" is misunderstood. The Kingdom of God "is taken most commonly for eternal felicity after this life, in the highest heaven...and sometimes for...sanctification...but never for monarchy" (35.1/271–2). Hobbes counters, "To the contrary, I find the KINGDOM OF GOD to signify, in most places of Scripture, a *kingdom properly so named*...and but seldom metaphorically; and then it is taken for *dominion over sin* (and only in the New Testament)" (35.2/272).

All creatures are naturally subjects in the kingdom of God, due to God's irresistible power, as we have seen in the discussion of natural theology in Chapter 1. But God from time to time has "also had *peculiar* subjects, whom he commanded by a voice, as one man speaketh to another." (35.3/272). This was literally a kingdom for the Jews in the Old Testament, and it is metaphorical kingdom for contemporary Christians awaiting the Second Coming. It will consist of the union of the elect after the Final Judgment, again in a literal kingdom.

I will only allude to Hobbes' discussion of the Old Testament details here, as I have addressed this argument elsewhere in detail, but suffice it to say that Hobbes thinks that Moses and the high priests of Israel were vicegerents in the service of God (the Father).²²² The first kingdom of God ended when the people of Israel requested a king (Saul). On this

²²² This tripartite kingdom of God: (1) literal in Israel under the Father, (2) metaphorical under the prophets and apostles via the Holy Spirit, and (3) literal again under Christ, is Hobbes' pattern of the Trinity. God is personated three times in three different figures/regimes, while remaining one God. I will discuss Hobbes' account of the Trinity (or his rejection of it in all practical terms) later.

Scriptural-historical basis, Hobbes therefore claims: “In short, the kingdom of God is a civil kingdom...which kingdom having been cast off in the election of Saul, the prophets foretold would be restored by Christ” (35.13/276). Until Christ returns, we are the subjects of his lieutenants, that is, our earthly sovereigns. This future restoration of God’s kingdom is, for Hobbes, the only way to make sense of the Christian commonplace, “Thy kingdom come.”

Like many thinkers of the time, Hobbes is eager to validate his eschatological vision by reference to Old Testament precedents, which serve as parallels or analogies for the future. Johann Sommerville observes that “of vital political importance to Hobbes’ contemporaries was the history of the early Christian church, and the history of the Ancient Jews whose practices had influenced the early Christians.”²²³ It is no surprise that Hobbes uses the Old Testament to validate his arguments, at least on their face.

After establishing that the kingdom of God is a *future* and *literal* kingdom, Hobbes proceeds to show that the kingdom is an *earthly* and a *material* kingdom. Again, Hobbes searches the Old Testament for inspiration for his argument. He starts with Adam, the first man. If Adam had not sinned, Hobbes avers, he would have lived forever, *on earth*. Christ’s sacrifice restored eternal life, but there are no reason to think that the *location* of that life changed.

Hobbes says very little about the actual resurrection and judgment, perhaps in part because the classic account of it is in his least favorite book of the Bible, *Revelation*, with its notoriously metaphorical style. Resurrection is clearly an act of special grace, and hence it will be miraculous, again another reason for Hobbes to be silent about it. The act of

²²³ Sommerville, “Hobbes, Selden, Erastianism, and the history of the Jews”, 160.

judgment itself proceeds according to God's inscrutable volition, providing Hobbes with a third reason to be chary of examining the Final Judgment in any detail. Hobbes is not given to flights of mystical indulgence. Moreover, what happens at the Final Judgment matters little in comparison to the end result.

After the resurrection the elect will be given, "glorious and spiritual bodies...they shall neither marry nor be given in marriage, nor eat and drink, as they did in their natural bodies, but live forever in their individual persons" (L44.27/426–7). By spiritual, Hobbes does not mean incorporeal, but "subtle, fluid, and invisible" (L34.3/262) or at least not "gross and corruptible" (L44.29/428). The saints will not procreate, in part because if they did, they would soon overcrowd the earth (L38.3/303)!

In a word, the elect "shall be restored to that estate wherein Adam was before he has sinned" (L44.28/427). The reference to Adam is important, both for the stylistic reasons mentioned above, but also because Adam's fall is the inverse of Christ's sacrifice. Adam's sin and fall from grace is reversed by Christ's innocent sacrifice. Humanity will reassume the likeness of Adam before he was corrupted by sin, but this requires time. Just as Adam lost his immortality, but lived on for many years, so Christ redeemed humanity and restored the promise of eternal life, but humanity must wait till the Final Judgment to be rewarded with it (see L38.3/303). There is a logical symmetry of Fall and Redemption.

Hobbes notes: "That the place wherein men are to live eternally after the resurrection is the heavens, meaning by heaven those parts of the world which are most remote from earth (as where the stars are, or above the stars, in another higher heaven, called *coelum empyreum*, whereof there is no mention in Scripture nor ground in reason) is not

easily to be drawn from any text that I can find.” (L38.4/303) Any reference to the Kingdom of Heaven is best understood to mean the Kingdom of the ruler *of* heaven, not a kingdom *in* heaven. Hobbes repeatedly insists that the kingdom of God will rise no higher than God’s own “footstool”.²²⁴

Furthermore, Scripture indicates specifically (in the Book of Isaiah) that the seat of the Kingdom of God will be in Jerusalem, and Hobbes endorses this as literal truth. This is an interesting conclusion at the very least because Hobbes refuses to interpret Hell in such literal terms, as we shall see, but also because it is more specific than Hobbes tends to be about such details.

Hobbes’ account of hell is in many ways similar to his discussion of heaven. While the elect arise from the dead to enjoy an earthly paradise, “so also God’s enemies and their torments after judgment appear by the Scripture to have their place on earth.” (L38.6/305–6) But the precise meaning of this earthly torment can be hard to discern from Scripture, Hobbes tells us.

Scripture refers to the place of punishment in a variety of ways, as being: underground in Tartarus, a bottomless pit; the home of giants; a lake of fire; utter darkness; and in Gehenna, a smoldering garbage dump outside of Jerusalem, noted for also being the place of idolatrous practices by the Israelites (L38.6–10/306–308). Many of these descriptors refer to actual historical places, and hence not all of them can be consistently maintained at the same time on a literal level. But since no one believes that eternal torment will actually

²²⁴ See 38.4 and 38.23

occur in the former garbage dump of Jerusalem, “it followeth, me thinks, very necessarily that that which is thus said concerning hell fire is spoken metaphorically” (L38.11/308).

First, Hobbes asserts that there is no literal tormentor. The names “Satan”, “Devil”, and “Abaddon” mean “Enemy”, “Accuser”, and “Destroyer” respectively, and “are therefore appellative, which ought not to have been left untranslated (as they are in the Latin and modern Bibles) because they seem to be the proper names of *demons*, and men are more easily seduced to believe the doctrine of devils,” which is of pagan and not Scriptural heritage (L38.12/308). The belief in devils originates in superstitious thinking, where humans invent easy, proximate solutions for problems with complex explanations.

Literal devils could be seen as independent agents of evil who have carved out their own kingdom, outside of the jurisdiction of God. Furthermore, such personifications of evil can be seen as an excuse for sin, blaming it on a third party rather than placing the fault squarely in human depravity. The “Enemy of God” therefore must live on earth, and is any enemy of true religion, according to Hobbes.

The reprobate do suffer “such bodily pains and calamities as are incident to those who not only live under evil and cruel governors, but have also for enemy the eternal king of the saints, God Almighty.” (L38.14/309). These punishments are coextensive with those “natural” punishments Hobbes discusses in Chapter 31 (§40/243), that is the pains of vice and immoderation.²²⁵ The embodied life of the reprobate and that of the elect will thus be marked contrasts. While the elect are given a “glorious, spiritual, and immortal body.”

²²⁵ See the discussion of “natural punishments” in Chapter 1. See also Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories*, pgs. 125–127, and Johann Sommerville, *Political Ideas in Historical Context*, pg. 141, for a discussion of natural punishments in Hobbes.

(L44.32/432), the reprobate retain their “gross and corruptible” forms, subject to the deleterious effects of sin.

The most important aspect of Hobbes’ account of hell is that, its torments are not eternal for the individual sinner, but include a *second death*. This notion of a second death that is at the center of Hobbes’ redescription of Hell. He draws this idea from Revelation 21:8: “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the *second death*.”²²⁶ Most interpreters have taken the second death to be metaphorical, as yet another way to express eternal torment, but for Hobbes, this second death is a literal expiration: the sinner entirely ceases to exist after the second death.

How then are we to make sense of “eternal suffering”? Unlike the elect, the reprobate retain their bodies and continue to have children, sown in sin. Some of these may in fact display enough virtue to join the ranks of the elect, but the vast majority will live brief and unhappy lives mired in sin. Hobbes writes:

For the wicked, being left in the estate they were in after Adam’s sin, may at the resurrection live as they did, marry, and give in marriage...and consequently may engender perpetually, after the resurrection, as they did before; for there is no place of Scripture to the contrary. (L44.29/428)

This amounts to “an immortality of the kind, but not of the persons of men” (L44.29/428). So an individual sinner permanently dies a second death, but there will be a population of sinners for all eternity. The eternity of torment applies most properly to the class, not to the members as such. This argument is undoubtedly strange, and may in fact be

²²⁶ Emphasis mine. King James Version, found online at: <http://etext.virginia.edu/kjv.browse.html> [.]

unique to Hobbes, but if Scripture paints him into a corner, he has his reasons for escaping in this way (see below).

3. What Is Necessary for Salvation

Salvation is equivalent to eternal life for Hobbes, both in terms of the Scriptures and natural reason. The argument is as follows: Being saved is to be protected from evils. Absolute salvation, salvation in an unqualified sense, must be absolute protection from evil.

And because man was created in a condition immortal, not subject to corruption, and consequently to nothing that tendeth to the dissolution of his nature, and fell from that happiness by the sin of Adam, it followeth that to be saved from sin is to be saved from all the evil and calamities that sin hath brought upon us. (38.15/310)

Hobbes goes further, noting that “since death and misery were the punishments of sin, the discharge of sin must also be a discharge of death and misery” (ibid.). The “discharge” of death, obviously, is eternal life. (No controversy, at least here).

But how do we obtain salvation, according to Hobbes?

The tradition has it that by following the orthodox doctrine in faith, thought, and deeds, we can obtain salvation. Unorthodox opinions, or heresies, are to be shunned, as they lead to damnation.²²⁷ Tiny differences of doctrine are understood to have great significance, as they can lead to the greatest of rewards or the worst of punishments. We have already seen Hobbes’ legalistic argument against heresy, and his crypto-tolerationist stance. This previous discussion must be combined with an understanding of his argument for what salvation requires.

²²⁷ See the Catholic Encyclopedia’s entry on heresy, accessed at: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07256b.htm> [.]

Hobbes follows Erasmus²²⁸ and mainstream Anglican contemporaries like William Chillingworth²²⁹ in adopting a theologically minimalist requirement for salvation, a deflationist strategy designed to minimize the importance of orthodoxy and keep the peace. He writes: “All that is NECESSARY *to salvation* is contained in two virtues: *faith in Christ*, and *obedience to laws*.” (L43.3/398). Salvation requires a virtue of thought (belief) and a practical virtue (obedience).

Hobbes addresses his second point first in his exposition. He argues: “The laws of God...are none but the laws of nature, whereof the principal is that we should not violate our faith, that is, a commandment to obey our civil sovereigns” (L44.5/399).

Regarding the first principle, Hobbes writes: “The *unum necessarium* (only article of faith which the Scripture maketh simply necessary to salvation) is this: that JESUS IS THE CHRIST.” (L44.11/402) Christ is understood as the redeemer prophesied in the Old Testament.

Hobbes makes five Scriptural arguments to support this claim: (1) the intention of all of the Gospels is to establish Christ as Saviour; (2) the actions of the apostles were restricted to preaching Christ’s return and his role as redeemer; (3) in several places, Scripture refers to salvation as easy; (4) Scripture asserts that faith in Christ is sufficient for salvation, “but more than sufficient is not necessary; and consequently no other article is required”

²²⁸ See the *Radical Reformation*...

²²⁹ See the highly illuminating article by Paul J. Johnson, “Hobbes’s Anglican Doctrine of Salvation” in *Thomas Hobbes in His Time*, ed. Ross, Ralph, Herbert W. Schneider, and Theodore Waldman. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974: 102–125.

(L44.15/404)²³⁰; (5) Scripture attests to the article being “the foundation of faith” (L44.16/404).

An important consequence of this is,

that pastors that teach this foundation, that *Jesus is the Christ*, though they draw from it false consequences (which all men are sometimes subject to), they may nevertheless be saved—much more, that they may be saved who, being no pastors, but hearers, believe that which is by their lawful pastors taught them. (L44.16/405)

The arguments holds, Hobbes says, even for *supreme* pastors – in other words, the sovereign! If a citizen judges privately that a legitimate public figure has erred in interpretation, she is nevertheless obliged to obey that authority. Thankfully, Hobbes argues, her soul is not at stake in such doctrinal disputes. As long as the fundamental article of faith is affirmed, quibbles in doctrine do not matter.

Even in the case when the sovereign is not Christian, the bonds of servitude remain in effect. Hobbes counsels such a subject to follow the example of Naaman, who denied his faith in public, yet kept it in his heart. Martyrdom is not required, in fact, it is repudiated for the general populace. God specifically calls individuals to give their lives for the faith, and those individuals are unambiguously informed. The insistence on martyrdom by the Church, where it occurs, is an ideological tool to assure the Pope’s authority over sovereigns by holding out the prospect of sainthood for the martyr for religion.²³¹

The assertion that “Jesus is the Christ” is in fact a pregnant proposition. He writes:

²³⁰ Hobbes, of course, is muddying the logic here. Just because something is a sufficient condition does not mean that it is a necessary condition. Having a monthly trolley pass is a condition sufficient to ride the trolley, but it is not a necessary condition – I could for instance, use a token. Paying a fare is a necessary and sufficient condition to ride the trolley (assuming we don’t have fare jumpers).

²³¹ See for instance, Hobbes’ discussion in 47.12/480.

But a man may here ask whether it be not as necessary to salvation to believe that God is omnipotent, Creator of the world, that Jesus Christ is risen, and that all men else shall rise again from the dead at the last day, as to believe that *Jesus is the Christ*. To which I answer: they are, and so are many more articles; but they are such as are contained in this one, and may be deduced from it, with more or less difficulty. (L44.18/406).

Recall that Hobbes argues, however, that “it is inequitable to say that faith is denied by implication” (L.App2.52/533).

So, on Hobbesian model, we must both *do* something (i.e., obey our rulers to the best of our ability) and *believe* something (i.e., that Jesus is the Christ) to be saved. Hence in an imprecise manner of speaking, we are justified by faith and by works. We cannot be said to be justified by the justice of our works, because “there is none that hath not transgressed the law of God.” (L44.20/408). The best we can hope for is for our will, the source of our works, to be freely accepted as just (enough). But God only accepts the works of the faithful. In neither case can the believer assert a *right* to salvation, only a hope to be spared from just punishment. Of course, like a good Calvinist, Hobbes asserts both that “good” works are the expression of “good” faith and that, “faith is the gift of God, and he giveth it to whom he will.” (L44.9/401).

II. Analysis

1. Historical Precedents

Jürgen Overhoff has drawn attention to the “striking” parallels between Hobbes’s eschatology and the wider culture of Christian radicalism in his book, *Hobbes’ Theory of the Will*.²³² I want to focus here specifically on the works of two Englishmen Overhoff and

²³² Overhoff, *Hobbes’s Theory of the Will*, 196. See the whole of Chapter 5 as well, especially pp. 192–201. Johnston also mentions Overton’s book in his article “Hobbes’ mortalism”.

others have referred to: *The Personall Reigne of Christ Upon Earth* by John Archer (1642)²³³ and *Mans Mortalitie* by Richard Overton (1644).²³⁴

John Archer was an English preacher who lived out the last days of his life as exile to the Netherlands. Archer's short book is a remarkable statement of millennialist exegesis, predicting the end of the Roman Church in 1666 and the return of Christ around 1700. Its title recalls the so-called "Personal Rule" of Charles I from 1629 to 1640, where he ruled England without the aid of Parliament.

Archer writes of three senses of "Christ's kingdom": providential, spiritual, and monarchical. Christ's providential kingdom is how he "manages the affairs of all the world" (PR, 1), as master of nature. His spiritual kingdom is power he "exercises over the consciences of some people, and in special, the elect of God" (PR, 2). Hobbes more or less endorses both of these senses.²³⁵

But Archer also writes of a future, literal, *monarchical* kingdom of Jesus Christ upon the earth, saying Christ "will govern as earthly *Monarchs* have done, that is, universally over the world...and in a worldly visible earthly glory" (PR, 2) Archer believes Christ was the ruler of the nation of Israel, and gave his orders directly to Moses and the high priests. Hence, "Christ's government of that Nation...was a shadow or type of this state of *Monarchical government*, which in due time he will have immediately and visibly over all Nations

²³³ Archer, John, *The Personall Reigne of Christ upon Earth*, London: Benjamin Allen, 1642. Available in electronic facsimile from Early English Books Online: <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home> [.] Hereafter I will abbreviate this work parenthetically as PR. I have taken editorial liberty and modernized the spelling of Archer's writing.

²³⁴ Overton, Richard. *Mans Mortalitie*. Edited by Harold Fisch. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1968 [1644]. Hereafter, citations are given parenthetically as MM. I have also modernized Overton's spelling and capitalization.

²³⁵ I say "more or less" because Archer goes to great lengths to emphasize that it is *Christ, specifically* at work in the world here. Hobbes views the different stages of the kingdom of God as aspects of the Trinity, reducing the three separate persons of the Trinity thereby to a purely political concept. God the Father ruled ancient Israel for Hobbes.

on the earth” (PR, 4). Christ’s return is predicted by the Book of Daniel as a “fifth monarchy” following after the Assyrians, Persians, Greek, and Roman kingdoms.²³⁶

Archer also draws the constant analogy between Adam’s original state and the human condition after Christ’s visible return: “*Adam’s* fall, and damning all mankind, was a Type or figure of Christ saving all the elect...So in the Sovereignty that Christ gave *Adam* over all that present World, was figured out the subjection of a World to come to *Christ*” (PR, 5). Archer incessantly interprets Old Testament events as a “shadow or type” of events at the end of days.

Much the same as with Hobbes, Archer believes that the resurrected saints shall enjoy “exemption from all bodily troubles” and “there shall be no violent or untimely death, by any grief, sickness, and trouble” (PR, 30). They “shall so yoke original sin as that it shall get little or no ground of them; and that which crowns all this, is, that there shall be no more decay, nor backsliding in holiness” (PR, 28). This state will nevertheless be an embodied one.

The wicked will coexist unhappily alongside the elect: “the sinner, though living long as well as the Saint, shall be cursed; therefore they shall be cursed tributaries” (21). Archer repeats the discussion of the “second death” several times, although he means it in the more traditional sense than Hobbes.

Richard Overton’s *Mans Mortalitie* is also a remarkable pamphlet, both in itself and in its relationship to Hobbes’ ideas. Overton was a Leveller, a political radical who occasionally wrote on theological matters. Levelers advocated extension of the franchise and religious

²³⁶ The Fifth Monarchy men were a group of English radicals during the Civil Wars, who clearly took some of their ideas from thinkers like Archer.

toleration, seeking to “level out” the differences between citizens.²³⁷ The book was an influential one. Burns notes, “Mans Mortalitie was the first English defense of soul sleeping to be published since the time of Tyndale, and in the religious ferment of the first civil war the tract received considerable attention.”²³⁸

A first point of comparison is that Overton’s overall methodology is at many points similar to Hobbes’. He places great emphasis on the power of natural reason and on the findings of contemporary science. He refers to Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, and the French surgical innovator Ambroise Paré by name. Overton points to a purely organic, some might say *materialist*, account of the mind²³⁹ and draws numerous parallels between animal cognition and human cognition. This unorthodox approach has earned Overton a reputation as an “unbeliever” in some of the secondary literature.²⁴⁰ However, Overton also presents an exhaustive catalog of Scripture to back up his claims, many of which he interprets metaphorically to his end. Overton and Hobbes frequently deploy overlapping passages of Scripture.

Overton, identically as Hobbes, thinks the soul or spirit is synonymous with “life or breath” (MM, 33). He says “by *spirit* is meant life” (MM, 54) and “by *body* and *spirit*, is meant whole man” (MM, 57). The soul is not a separate nor separable entity.

²³⁷ A historical letter, believed to be the first use of the term in print, states “They have given themselves a new name, viz. Levellers, for they intend to sett all things straight, and rayse a parity and community in the kingdom”. Cited in the entry on “Levellers” in the Encyclopedia Britannica, eleventh edition (1911). The material is reproduced online at Wikipedia.

²³⁸ Burns, *Christian Mortalism*, pg. 154.

²³⁹ See for instance, the discussion on pp. 21–23.

²⁴⁰ Fisch points out this reputation in his Introduction, before proceeding to demolish the idea. See pp. xvii–xix. It is of course a reputation Overton and Hobbes share.

Perhaps most importantly, Overton denies that natural immortality of the fallen human being, and is thus also a mortalist. The body is dead until the resurrection. When we die, “it is plain that during this death man is void of actual being” (MM, 15) and “during this death there is no more present being to man, then to an hidden abortive embryo in this life...which is to say, he absolutely *IS NOT*.” (MM, 16). Adam was “gloriously immortal” before the Fall (MM, 1). Not only does Overton offer a sustained argument for the death of the mind/soul with the body, he provides an account that Hobbes could endorse enthusiastically on his own terms – a natural-philosophical justification conspicuously absent in *Leviathan*!²⁴¹

Overton is aware that this idea is unusual. It might seem despondent, but “If it be scrupled, that this destroys the hope of our faith. I answer, it does but remove it from a false principle to a true, from a deceitful fancy to an infallible object, the Resurrection” (MM, 65). An Immortal soul would be “*Ens extra Deum*”, a think outside of God’s influence, which is both blasphemous and absurd (ibid.). Resurrection can only occur by an act of special grace.²⁴²

Like Hobbes, Overton believes that the idea of an immortal soul is a relic of pagan beliefs, smuggled into Christianity. After reviewing a long list of candidates for the “soul” Overton notes:

²⁴¹ In fact, reading Overton’s scientific account alongside Hobbes’ mortalist passages goes a long way toward shoring up Hobbes’ transition from materialism to mortalism, addressing several of the questions that have bedeviled interpreters. Nevertheless, there are several reasons why Hobbes’ would omit a natural scientific account of a mortal soul. The first is the Scriptural tone of the second half of the book. Such a scientific account would be at odds with Hobbes’ focus on revealed theology. Second, the question of eternal life is not (obviously, if at all) a question of natural theology, and hence we should not expect an account of a mortal “soul” in the first half of the book either.

²⁴² See, for instance, the comparison between birth and rebirth (resurrection) on pg. 75.

Diverse other conceptions and fancies there be, to uphold this ridiculous invention of the soul traducted [passed down—JH] from the *beathens*, who by the Book of Nature understood an immortality after death; but through their ignorance how, or which way; this invention (reported to be *Plato's*) was occasioned and begat a general belief: and so they, and after them the Christians have thus strained their wits to such miserable shifts, to define *what it is*, but neither conclude any certainty, or give satisfaction therein. (MM, 19)

Elsewhere, Overton refers disparagingly to “this Heathenish Invention about the soul” (MM, 58). Overton was not alone or unprecedented in thinking this way. Fisch observes “the ‘mortalist heresy’ is at bottom one of those recurrent upsurges of original Hebraic doctrine which occur throughout the history of the Church and at no time more than in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.” (MM, xviii). Overton “was trying to restore an ancient doctrine of Moses which has been overlaid and distorted by Graeco-Roman categories.” (MM, xix). Burns puts Overton squarely into the Protestant tradition of God’s omnipotence: “Overton...thought thnetopsychism, could increase a man’s sense of dependence on God.”²⁴³

Aside from these direct influences, there are several other incidental points of coincidence between Overton’s text and *Leviathan*. By themselves, these further points do not speak decisively, but taken together demonstrate a clear overlap of ideas and language between Hobbes and the other two.

Overton sarcastically rejects the Cœlum Empyreum of Aquinas as the dwelling of Christ, which Hobbes likewise scoffs at in Ch. 37.4.

Overhoff points to an example which is nearly identical in both Hobbes and in Overton. Both criticize the Scholastic attempt to locate the soul in the body, simultaneously

²⁴³ Burns, *Christian Mortalism*, pg. 156.

in a part as well as entirely in the whole – Hobbes jokes about the soul abiding in the little finger, Overton in the big toe.²⁴⁴

Both thinkers are skeptical about the nature of Hell, Overton observes “those and such like places which literally seem to import Hell, conclude the thing no more, then other literal expressions prove God to have corpulent eyes, eares, hands, &c. but are expressions after the manner of men” (MM, 39–40), and are metaphorical.

It was not uncommon for 17th century writers to fail to footnote their works in a way that would satisfy a modern reader, both for considerations of style and out of a desire not to seem unoriginal.²⁴⁵ So it should not surprise us that *Leviathan* contains no references to either Archer or Overton.²⁴⁶ Given the similarities of their ideas and their historical proximity, it therefore seems difficult to deny that Hobbes was familiar with these texts, either directly or by word of mouth. In fact, if Hobbes had read Overton, he may have heard of Archer’s work that way.²⁴⁷ To be cautious, we should note that it is possible that Hobbes merely partook of these ideas as part of his general intellectual climate, without knowing these works by name or firsthand acquaintance.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁴ See Overton, 220n229. The reference is to L 46.19 and to MM, 24.

²⁴⁵ See for instance, Sommerville, *Political Ideas in Historical Context*, pg. 161–162.

²⁴⁶ In fact *Leviathan* is particularly stingy, there is one positive reference to Selden, and several condemnations of other thinkers. Bellarmine gets the only extended, citational discussion that is not tied to the Bible. Even Aristotle is criticized without citations.

²⁴⁷ Overton approvingly mentions Archer’s book no less than three times in its brief length: pp. 39, 41, 49.

²⁴⁸ This is how Burns see the relationship between Milton and Overton, who in spite of many similarities argues that “Those parallels are not so striking in either exegetical content or expression as to demonstrate that Milton owed any debt to Overton directly. At most we may conclude that such a debt is possible. It is, I think, more likely that Milton and Overton both drew ideas from the lively discussion of mortalism that was conducted first among the sects and then, as the orthodox preachers tried to combat the idea from their pulpits, more generally among Christian Londoners as they tested against Scripture what was told them from tub and pulpit.” (*Christian Mortalism*, pg. 169) If one replaces Milton’s name with Hobbes’, one can also be tempted to agree with Burns here, and what applies to Overton can probably also be safely said to apply to John Archer.

Yet there are important differences between both authors and Hobbes.

Archer, for one, is not a mortalist, although his view of the soul is eccentric.

The personal reign of Christ on earth, is for Archer, a finite preamble to the last judgment, lasting “only” a thousand years. After the last judgment, the elect proceed to heaven. Obviously, Hobbes sees the earthly kingdom of God as the final stage of his eschatology. (Nevertheless they both agree that the world beneath Heaven is God’s “footstool” in some sense or other).²⁴⁹ True Heaven is for Archer, “so high above our capacity, that we cannot conceive it at all until we enjoyed this of Christ’s kingdom” (PR, 31). While Hobbes agrees that God’s abode is inconceivable to mortal minds, he eschews entirely the mysticism so frequent in Archer.

Hell for Archer is a restoration of primordial Chaos, the state of the world before *Genesis*, a vision which Overton, incidentally, also found to be compelling. The souls of the damned are condemned there for all eternity.

Hobbes scrupulously avoids predicting when Christ will return, which is one of Archer’s explicit goals. Hobbes’ principles of scriptural interpretation will not let him press the “obscure” metaphorical texts of future prophesy.²⁵⁰ Furthermore, even if Hobbes believed that Christ would return in 1700 or thereabouts, he had good reasons of political order to keep him from mentioning it. Hobbes is wary of millennialism and the panic such doctrines can bring with them.

²⁴⁹ PR, 33 and L38.4 and L38.23.

²⁵⁰ See Farr, “Atomes of Scripture”.

Overton is circumspect on the shape of the resurrection and much of the afterlife (as is Hobbes), although he believes Heaven is beyond the Sun, which acts as a veil to screen us from the “glorious light” of God!²⁵¹

These differences suggest that Hobbes was not merely lifting the ideas whole cloth but carefully assimilating them to his thought. He sidesteps the more speculative, mystical, and/or fantastic elements of both Archer and Overton. Hobbes is certainly not a prophet, millennialist, or a political radical. Nevertheless, the main ideas of each thinker, an earthly Kingdom of God for Archer and a mortal soul for Overton both sit well with Hobbes’ system and have at least a *prima facie* Scriptural basis. Whatever he thought of the wider context of English religious radicalism, Hobbes certainly drew inspiration from Archer and Overton, adopting what he thought were good (or at least useful) ideas, regardless of their origin, and concurring on the Scriptural basis of these positions.

What is stunning about the overlap is the extent to which Hobbes utilized radical religious inspiration in the name of what were deeply conservative goals.²⁵² Clearly he was widely read in this literature and versed in this conversation, all the while remaining aloof from it in terms of his wider political commitments. Burns comments,

It is doubtful...that Hobbes would have conceived of the Kingdom of God as an earthly political kingdom ruled by Christ if the same view had not been expressed by innumerable radical Protestants since the early days of the reformation. Like Milton, Hobbes was no sectary, but he was not ashamed to incorporate into his own system whatever he thought sound in the revisionist theology of the sects.²⁵³

²⁵¹ See MM, 49–53. Fisch argues that this is one of Overton’s most unique, and poetic, theological speculations. Overton certainly argues eloquently on its behalf.

²⁵² This recalls the subtitle of Arnold Rogow’s biography of Hobbes: “Thomas Hobbes: Radical in the service of reaction”. New York: WW Norton, 1986.

²⁵³ Burns, *Christian Mortalism*, pg. 187.

2. Philosophical Underpinnings

Hobbes' eschatology is a masterful example of his redescriptive methodology at work. Hobbes reconceptualizes the critical elements of the Christian apocalypse in the image of his philosophical system. He presents us with a vision that is amenable to his materialist concerns, but more importantly, addresses the urgent practical concerns engendered by controversy over the afterlife. Hobbes hopes, then, to construct an account of the end times that is first and foremost politically expedient.

A literal kingdom of God on earth serves several functions. The first is ontological parsimony. One does not have to imagine or infer the existence of other worlds. An invisible parallel world is not needed. Second, and related to the first, an earthly kingdom of God is epistemologically accessible. It is a potential object for ordinary experience. Third, it is consonant with materialism.

Finally, and most importantly, an earthly kingdom of God is the outgrowth of a salutary political arrangement: the absolute dominion of church affairs by the sovereign. Hobbes repudiates the traditional view of an independent, "spiritual" Church, which claims to be the kingdom of God on earth, here and now. He writes, "The greatest and main abuse of Scripture (and to which all the rest are either consequent or subservient) is the wresting of it to prove that the kingdom of God...is the present Church (or multitude of Christian men now living, or that, being dead, are to rise again at the last day)" (L44.4/412). While I do not wish to rehearse the argument for this position here, by placing the kingdom of God on earth and in the future, Hobbes is answering the question of what replaces the traditional

account of the kingdom of God.²⁵⁴ At the same time, he is arguing against any account of divided sovereignty. Hobbes gives us his final say: “If the Kingdom of God...were not a kingdom which God by his lieutenants of vicars...did exercise on earth, there would not have been so much contention and war about who it is by whom God speaketh to us; neither would many priests have troubled themselves with spiritual jurisdiction, nor any king have denied it them.” (L35.13/277).

Theological minimalism is an efficacious position for Hobbes for many reasons. First, it reduces the believer’s anxiety about his or her future by providing a clear and easily attainable path to salvation. It helps prevent doctrinal disputes from flaring up into religious strife, because the stakes involved are purely intellectual and not eternal life or torment. It minimizes the impact of a specialist theologian caste by rendering their insights subject entirely to the sovereign on the one hand, and diminishing their importance on the other. It reduces or eliminates the impulse to martyrdom, by emphasizing the obedience requirement, and pointing to the special vocation of true martyrs.

Both a materialist salvation and doctrinal minimalism are exemplary features of Hobbes’ eschatology, but his mortalism (and the account of the second death) is the centerpiece of his theory. It is the glue that holds the whole together.

One of the most interesting interpretive questions surrounding Hobbes’ mortalism is why he changed his position in *Leviathan* from the comparatively orthodox position of the *Elements* and *De Cive*. Several theories suggest themselves. One is that the comparatively lax

²⁵⁴ The argument against the kingdom of God belonging in some sense to the present world is a subject I will take up in a later chapter, where I explore Hobbes’ Erastian ecclesiology. The notion of heaven-on-earth thus plays an important, but minor, role in the argument for church government, but it is properly an eschatological concept, and hence belongs in this chapter.

censorship in England at the time allowed Hobbes to feel comfortable expressing his true feelings, and that he was a mortalist all along. Another theory is that Hobbes' exposure to thinkers like Archer and Overton changed his mind. Both the *Personall Reign* and *Man's Mortalitie* were published around the time Hobbes concluded writing *De Cive* in 1642 so that he could have been unaware of them until after he published that work. Yet another theory is that he altered his position to rectify a previously-undetected defect in his political theory, the fear, on the part of religious dissenters that they would be damned if they refused to act on their state-subversive beliefs, as David Johnston argues in "Hobbes's mortalism".²⁵⁵ Some combination of all these suggestions is likely.

Personally, I am inclined to believe that Hobbes had not considered the mortalist doctrine seriously until he read some of the radical Christian literature of the time, and finding inspiration there, discovered it's affinity with the elements of his wider system, and the doctrine's utility for addressing some of the problems raised by the civil wars. The comparatively tolerant climate of 1651 only served to remove whatever prudential concerns Hobbes might have had with expressing such a radical doctrine so freely.

Hobbes indeed has several strong reasons from within his philosophical system to reject the natural immortality of the soul and embrace mortalism. In brief: First, mortalism squares with his materialism, if not by necessary implication, then by philosophical affinity. Second, the doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul is an inheritance from Greek religion and philosophy, and has no Scriptural basis. It is fantastic, unscientific, and most importantly, Unchristian. Third, an immortal soul needs no help from God to persist, a

²⁵⁵ See David Johnston, "Hobbes's Mortalism", pg. 662–663.

concept which Hobbes finds theologically suspect. Finally, there are adverse political consequences to maintaining the soul's immortality – among them purgatory and the fear of eternal torments.

First, immortal souls are commonly conceptualized as incorporeal spirits, and there is no such thing as an incorporeal spirit for Hobbes. This assertion of incorporeality contradicts his *materialism*, as we have already seen. But, as David Johnston points out “The corporeal or incorporeal nature of the soul is a separate issue from its mortality or immortality.”²⁵⁶ It is not logically necessary for a body to be mortal. So it is logically consistent to maintain the soul is corporeal, but immortal, as Hobbes seems to have done in both the *Elements* and *De Cive*. In those works, he adopts the traditional picture of the soul as separable from the body and immortal, he just attaches the rider that the soul might just be merely physical.

But because mortalism is not a logically entailed by materialism, which I grant, does not mean that it is impossible to maintain that souls do not exist independently of the body and that they are thus mortal. In fact, it seems sensible on some level if we believe that all the ordinary objects of experience admit of change, of generation and corruption. This gives us a philosophical reason to endorse mortalism on Hobbes' premises.

Adam before the Fall was an exception to this general rule. But Hobbes always characterizes the state of the elect after the final judgment as returning to an Adamic state via an act of special grace. The ordinary workings of the universe seem to reject the notion that created things are immortal, and the world after the Second Coming is an exceptional

²⁵⁶ Johnston, “Hobbes's mortalism”, 654.

time, where the hand of God is more evident and active than previously seen in the postlapsarian age. Recall that Adam himself was created individually and by a special act of God; Eve also.

Second, the doctrine of an immortal soul is a relic of Greek “demonology”, which found a philosophical expression in the works of Plato and Aristotle. Plato’s *Phaedo* was a crucial *philosophical* expression of this idea of the soul’s immortality as is the doctrine of “separated essences” derived from Aristotle. The importation of “separated essences” into their work by later Scholastic theologians gave support to this notion of an naturally independent and immortal soul, but as Hobbes argues, this is not *Scripturally* justified. Hobbes can make a convincing case that by arguing *sola Scriptura*, one can find independent confirmation of his scientific account. The fact that Hobbes was not the only one of his contemporaries to make this argument, lends credence to his claims. By casting doubt on the origins of the idea, Hobbes was also bringing suspicion onto the promulgators of the doctrine, namely officials of established Churches.

Third, a naturally immortal soul does not seem to depend on God for its existence, which for Hobbes is *theologically* perplexing. A naturally immortal soul is independent from divine power. Seemingly, such a soul could not, for instance, be destroyed by God should he so desire. This would limit the omnipotence of God. Hobbes is here also affirming the Calvinist notion that everything depends entirely on God’s active choice for its existence, and that eternal life is a voluntary act of “special grace”, not something assumed. “For supposing eternal life by grace only, there is no life but the life of the body, and no immortality till the resurrection.” (L44.30/429) This third objection bleeds over into political

considerations, because the absolute, unchecked power of God's will is the model for Hobbes' sovereign, and a naturally immortal soul is like a dissenter clinging to "liberty".

Finally and most importantly, the doctrine entails other "dark doctrine[s]" (L44.16/420) which produce undesirable *political* effects. Hobbes lists three such effects: (a) the doctrine of purgatory, (b) the belief in ghosts, and (c) eternal torments. All three doctrines enhance the power of an independent clergy over and against the power of the sovereign.

(a) As we have seen, Hobbes argues that the early Church fathers unquestioningly accepted the immortality of the soul on the basis of their encounters with Greek philosophy. This led them to speculate on where souls might go after the death of the body. In time, a consensus was reached, and "the Church of Rome found it more profitable to build for them [the souls] this place of purgatory" (L44.16/420). That profit resides in a literal sense in the sale of indulgences, which rests upon the belief that the Roman Church alone can help the souls of those in purgatory to reach heaven – no mean political leverage! Purgatory helps drive a wedge into the loyalties of subjects, potentially forcing them to choose between their sovereign and their religious leaders. If purgatory is not hell, it is not heaven either. Nor is it akin to earthly life. It is discomfort, perhaps best seen as a "little hell". It is potentially terminable, but without the "proper" intercessions, a soul could spend a long time in purgatory. The doctrine of purgatory preys on fears of being trapped in some intermediary state, and provides social power to the organization that can alleviate those worries.

As an aside, the controversy over the "intermediate state" also raises questions about the nature of the final judgment and eternal life in general. On the traditional Protestant

view, which rejects purgatory, souls go immediately to heaven or hell after the death of the body. There they await the Final Judgment. Final Judgment solidifies the fate of the elect and the reprobate, they experience the full force of their sentence, which they had only experienced in a limited form prior. The mortalist tradition had problems with this interpretation because not only did it open the doors to detestable Catholic doctrines, but it diminished the role and grandeur of the Final Judgment. On the mortalist account, the Final Judgment restores life (or consciousness) to the dead, and marks the exact point of when eternal bliss or suffering begins. This account also dovetails with the common idea that resurrection was to include the body. The mortalist maintains that they sidestep errant theology and give dignity to what all Christians regarded as a watershed event in sacred history.²⁵⁷ Mortalists, Hobbes among them, could argue for the felicitous consequences of their beliefs as well as for their Scriptural basis.

(b) The belief in ghosts also furthers the power of the Church against the sovereign, by supporting the practice of exorcism, itself another pagan relic dressed up in Christian grab. The belief in ghosts also builds up fear of being trapped between worlds, potentially forever.

A further, unintended consequence of the belief in ghosts is to further perpetuate superstitious and unscientific thinking among the masses. This allows them to be manipulated for political gain by demagogues.

(c) Eternal torment is the ultimate threat to the disobedient, and the biggest worry of any sincere believer. But there are serious objections be made to the idea.

²⁵⁷ See Burns, *Christian Mortalism*, pgs. 33–34.

The Christian God is commonly understood to be merciful to sinners. In this light, Hobbes observes,

it seemeth hard, to say that God, who is the father of mercies, that doth in heaven and earth all that he will, that hath the hearts of all men in his disposing, and without whose free gift a man hath neither the inclination to good nor repentance of evil, should punish men's transgressions without any end of time, and with all the extremity of torture that men can imagine, and more. (L44.26/426)

Since all things depend on God, in both Hobbes' physical determinism and his theological predestinarianism, it does seem strange to punish eternally for crimes that God foresaw and permitted to happen, which but for the action of his grace would not occur. A second death seems to be more compatible with the idea of God as the Father of Mercy.

By mitigating the fear of eternal suffering with the idea of a second death, Hobbes relies upon the following line of reasoning, which I quote almost in its entirety from *Anti-White*:

...White slips into the question: 'Is it better not to exist at all than to suffer eternal torment, when happiness is lost?' In my opinion, not to exist is preferable to existence in such a state. The nature of goodness consists in its pleasing [us] or in its being eagerly desired, but of evil in its being repellant or despicable. We may say, then: 'Nothing is worse or more shunned than the greatest evil, from which we can never extricate ourselves.' But if 'not to exist' were *worse* than to suffer everlasting affliction, 'not to be' would be more hateful than torment, because clearly non-being endures no pain; therefore [non-being] is not evil. That we prefer a torment *which lasts* [only] *for a fixed, finite, and short period* to perishing or to death is due not to the loathsomeness associated with death or with our ceasing-to-be, but either to the hope of receiving, with life itself, the joys of life, or to the fear of [suffering] pain as we die.²⁵⁸

The passage unambiguously endorses the belief that nonexistence is preferable to eternal suffering. Hobbes does not discuss the matter this frankly in *Leviathan*, but I feel it is safe to assume continuity on this issue between *Leviathan* and *Anti-White*—certainly it sheds light on the fate of the reprobate under sentence of a second death.

²⁵⁸ *Anti-White*, 39.3/486. I thank Johnston's and Overhoff's writings for drawing my attention to this passage.

While the merits of the position can be debated, it certainly seems to be clear. White certainly disagreed, but the utilitarian tradition might concur with Hobbes. GE Moore, for instance, might argue that considered solely on its own, oblivion would be preferable to a state of affairs consisting of the consciousness of pain and nothing else.²⁵⁹ Advocates of euthanasia seem to embrace this position, although the individual's view of the afterworld would influence this. Most importantly, this belief has a basis in Hobbes' own ethical position, where pain is associated with evil, and violent (read: painful) death is regarded as the worst evil. Violent death is evil, not because it causes death/annihilation, but because it entails pain and fear.

The reinterpretation of hell as involving a second death speaks to a contemporary historical fear. Many people suspected they were unworthy to enter heaven, and worried that they were condemned to hell, even those who were faithful.²⁶⁰ Certainly, certain interpretations of the doctrine of predestination did not allay any fears in this respect. Even an outwardly virtuous and religiously observant person could lack saving faith. The concern was that people who felt they were condemned to eternal torment would have "nothing to lose" and would be disruptive and vicious. By recasting their fate as temporary, some of the subversive effects of a nihilistic outlook could potentially be blunted, even for those convinced of their damnation.

All three of these doctrines (purgatory, ghosts, and eternal torments) empower a priestly caste over and against legitimate sovereigns, forcing subjects to choose, allegedly,

²⁵⁹ See Moore, *Principia Ethica*, especially ¶112, 127.

²⁶⁰ For a discussion of this worry, even among those that would consider themselves elect, see RT Kendall's book on English Calvinism.

between God and King. All three problems ultimately reduce to the question of who has the ultimate sanction (access or not to eternal bliss/damnation) at their disposal. (I will address Hobbes' specific ecclesiastical criticisms in the next section, but these political concerns are important enough to allude to here.)

Mortalism is thus a watershed moment for Hobbes' thought, it combines elements of each aspect of his philosophy, leveraging them into a new interpretation of Christian doctrine that favors clearheaded, scientific thinking on the one hand, and stable sovereignty on the other.

Eternal life is a crucial political problem with high stakes, because "it is impossible that a commonwealth should stand where any other than the sovereign hath a power of giving greater rewards than life, and of inflicting greater punishments than death." (L37.1/301) It is obvious that "*eternal life* is a greater reward than the *life present*, and *eternal torment* a greater punishment than the *death of nature*" (ibid.). We have seen Hobbes' answers to these questions. No one other than the sovereign has the keys to heaven or hell. Eternal life is easy to achieve if you obey the legitimate authorities; you will not be damned for minor errors in doctrine. Eternal torment does not apply to the individual. If hell is a possibility, it is only a temporary punishment followed by sweet (by comparison) oblivion. Hell is not a worse evil, then, than the state of nature.

Chapter 5: Ecclesiology, Erastianism, and Anticlericalism

“I may attribute all the changes of religion in the world to one and the same cause, and that is, unpleasing priests, and those not only amongst Catholics, but even in the church that hath presumed most of reformation.” (L12.32/73–4).²⁶¹

Even though it is from the first half of *Leviathan*, this epigraph neatly summarizes Hobbes’ view of the priesthood and its ambitions against legitimate authority. In this chapter, I turn my attention to the issues of church government and organization in Hobbes’ *Leviathan*. Hobbes devotes an enormous amount of time defending his vision of the relationship between church and state, although his basic position was by no means an unfamiliar or an unpopular one to his contemporaries. Nevertheless, Hobbes alienated many of his old friends with his scathing rhetoric and unflinching conclusions.

Hobbes famously tells us: “Temporal and spiritual government are but two words brought into the world to make men see double and mistake their lawful sovereign.” (L39.5/316). The problem of a separate church and state, and the relations between these two power centers, is a new one, Hobbes informs us.

This difficulty hath not been of very great antiquity in the world. There was no such dilemma amongst the Jews...Nor is it a controversy that was ever taken notice of amongst the Grecians, Romans, or other Gentiles...This difficulty therefore remaineth amongst, and troubleth those Christians only, to who it is allows to take for the sense of the Scripture that which they make thereof, either by their own private interpretation, or by the interpretation of such as are not called thereunto by public authority (EL25.2/141–2).

Hobbes will systematically attack and undermine any such claims to private interpretation, either first-hand or from the mouth of another.

²⁶¹ Clarendon, in his “Survey” quotes this passage directly (though slightly inaccurately), and says that Hobbes with that last phrase “intends the Church of England, at that time under the most severe and barbarous persecution; and therefore it was the enviously and maliciously, as well as dishonestly alleged.” *Survey*, pg. 25 (spelling modernized). I certainly do not see Clarendon overreaching with the implication.

In criticizing the division of power into temporal and spiritual, Hobbes is working here against the traditional interpretation of the roles of Church and State, as understood by the Roman Church and, as it turns out, mainstream Anglicans and Presbyterians as well. Hobbes sees the entirety of church government and church powers under control of the sovereign. This position has come to be known as *Erastianism*, after a thinker whose name became synonymous with these ideas, the Swiss physician Thomas Lüber (1524–1583), also known as Erastus. Erastus was famous for writing 75 Theses denying the right of clergymen to exercise the power of excommunication independent of the consent of the civil authorities.²⁶²

Radical (“full-blown”) Erastianism was not uncommon among intellectuals of Hobbes’ time, like John Selden,²⁶³ and there was a strain of Erastian thinking in Anglican thought as well.²⁶⁴ The terms of the Act of Supremacy (1559) granted the English Monarch total control over the Church of England:

such jurisdictions, privileges, superiorities and pre-eminences, spiritual and ecclesiastical, as by any spiritual or ecclesiastical power or authority have heretofore been, or may lawfully be exercised or used for the visitation of the ecclesiastical state and persons, and for reformation, order and correction of the same, and of all manner of errors, heresies, schisms,

²⁶² See Sommerville, *Thomas Hobbes: Political Ideas in Historical Context*, 128; see also Collins, *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes*, pp. 17–18; 171. “Erastianism” as understood in Hobbes’ time meant far more than Erastus himself advocated for in his *Theses*, and was understood to mean the total dependence of church power on the civil authority.

²⁶³ After the publication of *Leviathan*, Hobbes sought out and became friends with Selden on the basis of his Erastian beliefs among other reasons. He gave Selden a personal copy. But Hobbes was well acquainted with Selden’s work beforehand. Selden is one of the few contemporary authors mentioned favorably in *Leviathan*. Hobbes praises his book on titles of honor at L10.52/56. See Sommerville, “Selden, Erastianism, and the History of the Jews”.

²⁶⁴ See Sommerville and Collins above. Sommerville notes, “It is sometimes said that the Anglican clergy was Erastian in outlook. This is true in so far as clerics granted the monarch supremacy over ecclesiastical affairs, and held that churchmen can exercise their functions only with their sovereign’s permission. But on other points they parted company with Erastus.” (128)

abuses, offenses, contempts and enormities, shall for ever, by authority of this present Parliament, be united and annexed to the imperial crown of this realm.²⁶⁵

There was plenty of healthy disagreement on the specifics of the Act, but the crown did have the right to choose its bishops and replace them if it desired.²⁶⁶ So it was not controversial for Anglican clergy to see their appointments governed by the sovereign. However, as we shall see, the power of excommunication and the idea of apostolic succession remained enormous points of contention across the broad intellectual landscape of Hobbes' time.

Sommerville offers a useful summary of the background conditions and Hobbes relationship to them,

The main theoretical presumption of the Erastians was that two independent jurisdictions – civil and ecclesiastical – are impossible in one commonwealth. They supported this with a set of detailed claims about ancient Jewish and early Christian history. Hobbes endorsed their theoretical premise, and their conclusions, but took his own highly original and idiosyncratic line on history.²⁶⁷

Hobbes' argument for his version of the Erastian position occupies an enormous part of the second half of *Leviathan*, and includes the longest single chapter in the book.

Hobbes presents his arguments in four of the Chapters of Part III and in (parts of at least) all four Chapters of Part IV. The Erastian argument, in one form or another occupies a significant portion of the second half of *Leviathan*, more than any other issue. The space devoted to it alone testifies to the political importance of the issue for Hobbes.

In Part III, Hobbes first defines a Church in Chapter 29. After this, he switches to his historical-Scriptural argument for the unity of Church and State. He discusses the Old

²⁶⁵ Section 8 of the Act of Supremacy, in *Documents of the English Reformation*, page 322.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., Section 10 (323–324).

²⁶⁷ Sommerville, "Hobbes, Selden, Erastianism, and the History of the Jews", pg. 174.

Testament, with an emphasis on the figure of Moses (Chapter 40); he then turns his attention to Christ, (chapter 41); finally, he addresses the Church in the era after Christ's death, through the conversion of monarchs from paganism to Christianity, up to (but not including) his Second Coming (Chapter 42). The latter is the single longest chapter in the whole book.

This threefold discussion can be mapped onto three historical periods, the past (Moses to Christ), the present (the time of the Apostles up to Christ's return), and the future (Christ's Second Coming and after). Furthermore, each of these historical periods is identifiable with a figure of the Trinity and its chosen representative person. The *past* is the time of the *Father*, personated by Moses and the high priests of Israel up to the time of Christ; the *present* era is the time of the *Holy Spirit*, first with the Apostles, and then working through God's "lieutenants", civil sovereigns; the *future* is the time of *Christ*, the Son, as king.²⁶⁸ Patricia Springborg summarizes this nicely, when she writes that Hobbes' "theory constitutes a periodization of sacred history as an elaborate structure of two spheres, three worlds, and three-phase time."²⁶⁹ Hobbes doctrine of the Trinity did not pass without its share of criticism. I will consider the orthodox fallout from this position later on in the discussion.

In part IV, "Of the Kingdom of Darkness", Hobbes examines the self-authenticating errors that infiltrated the Christian mind, slowly over time, and which lead to its corruption. He devotes a large section of Chapter 44 (on the misinterpretation of Scripture) to a critique

²⁶⁸ Christ's (first, earthly) life is subsumed under the reign of the Father, as Hobbes later makes clear at the end of L41.

²⁶⁹ Springborg, "Leviathan and the Problem of Ecclesiastical Authority", pg 294. See also JGA Pocock, "Time, History, and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes".

of Papal (and other sects') arguments. Chapter 45 argues that many elements of Catholic ceremony and theology are demonological "relics of the religion of the Gentiles". The critique of Scholasticism and Aristotle occupies Chapter 46. Lastly, Chapter 47 points out the benefits the "errors" (really, willful distortions) of the previous three chapters accrued to. Hobbes' point in Part IV is to ridicule the metaphysics of Scholasticism and accuse clerics of usurping sovereign power under cover of an intellectual smoke screen.

Hobbes' argument throughout is bold and provocative. But it is also well-informed. Patricia Springborg praises the depth of Hobbes' commentary on the subject, "Hobbes' theology shows that he had done his homework. Not only could he apply humanist techniques of biblical criticism but his knowledge of ecclesiology was extensive."²⁷⁰

The Definition of a Church

Hobbes defines a Church, "to be a company of men professing Christian religion, united in the person of one sovereign, at whose command they ought to assemble, and without whose authority they ought not to assemble." (L39.4/315–6)²⁷¹ An immediate corollary of this definition is "that there is on earth no such universal Church as all Christians are bound to obey, because there is no power on earth to which all commonwealths are subject." (L39.5/316) Hobbes rejects a division between temporal and spiritual sovereignty, arguing that "There is...no other government in this life, neither of state nor religion, but temporal" (L39.5/316). Hobbes adds, "Who that one chief pastor is,

²⁷⁰ Springborg, "Hobbes and Bellarmine", pg. 512.

²⁷¹ The original definition is in italics.

according to the law of nature, hath already been shown, namely, that is the civil sovereign” (ibid., emphasis mine).

The preponderance of Parts III and IV of *Leviathan* marshals the *Scriptural* evidence for the unity of temporal and spiritual power, or in terms more amenable to Hobbes himself, for the total control of religious institutions by the civil sovereign.

Moses and the Old Testament

Johann Sommerville observes that ancient “Jewish customs were seen as highly relevant to Christians”, so the Old Testament is a good place to start in any analysis of the relation between Church and State, and Hobbes was no exception.²⁷²

Abraham was the first ruler of the Jewish people and exercised total control over the civil and religious life of the early Jews, “For God spake only to Abraham; and it was he only that was able to know what God said, and to interpret the same to his family” (L40.4/318). Isaac and then Jacob took up this mantle. But after the captivity in Egypt, the succession was ended.

Moses was selected by God to be the ruler of the Israelites, but because he had no claim to the sovereignty of Abraham, his power was “grounded on the consent of the people and their promise to obey him.” (L40.6/319). The people believed that Moses spoke with

²⁷² Sommerville, “Hobbes, Selden, Erastianism, and the History of the Jews”, pg. 168.

God and “elected” him their ruler on this basis. Hence, Moses was in fact a sovereign by institution.²⁷³

Hobbes argues that “it is plain that Moses, who was alone called up to God (and not Aaron, nor the other priests, nor the seventy elders, nor the people who were forbidden to come up), was alone he that represented to the Israelites the person of God, that is to say, was their sole sovereign under God.” (L40.7/319).²⁷⁴ If we take Moses as our model, and there is no reason on Hobbes’ terms not to, “we may conclude that whosoever in a *Christian* commonwealth holdeth the place of Moses is the sole messenger of God, and interpreter of his commandments.” (L40.7/321). Hence,

no man ought in the interpretation of Scripture to proceed further than the bounds which are set by their several sovereigns. For the Scriptures, since God now speaketh in them, are the Mount Sinai, the bounds whereof are the laws of them that represent God’s person on earth. To look upon them, and therein to behold the wondrous works of God, and learn to fear him, is allowed; but to interpret them, that is, to pry into what God saith to him who he appointeth to govern under him, and makes themselves judges whether he govern as God commandeth him or not, is to transgress the bounds God hath set, and to gaze upon God irreverently. (ibid.)

Remember that to look upon the face of God is to die; to interpret the Scriptures is to risk a similar fate.

Moses authorized who was a prophet. The seventy elders who prophesied existed by Moses’ appointment. “By which” Hobbes writes, “it is manifest that no subject ought to pretend to prophecy, or to the spirit, in opposition to the doctrine established by him who God hath set in the place of Moses.” (L40.8/321).

²⁷³ See Ch. 18 of *Leviathan*. This is one of the rare instances where Hobbes actually provides an example of a commonwealth by institution. As we have seen, using Old Testament events and precedents is a validating trope both in Hobbes’ time and for Hobbes in particular.

²⁷⁴ The parenthetical remark is a clever stab at the other modes of Church organization in Hobbes’ time: Aaron would be a bishop, signifying episcopacy; the elders are presbyters, and the people seem to be standing in for the Independents. All of these owe their powers to the sovereign.

The Levites, the tribe of Israel from whom the priests were called, were unable to own land in Israel, but were provided with a tithe to survive. But this was not an independent provision made outside of the regular channels, “it is manifest that the right of tithes and offerings was constituted by the civil power.” (L42.61/364) And, as Hobbes implies, what the sovereign gives, he can also take away (or modify) at his discretion.

After the death of Moses, the high priest assumed the role of sovereign, and this was true until the election of Saul as king, “And whereas before all authority, both in religion and policy, was in the high-priest, so now it was all in the king.” (L40.11/323).

The record seems clear, argues Hobbes, “from the practice of those times there can no argument be drawn that the right of supremacy in religion was not in the kings.” (L40.13/325). Hence, “so far forth as concerneth the Old Testament, we may conclude that whosoever had also the supreme authority of the commonwealth amongst the Jews, the same had also the supreme authority in matter of God’s external worship and representeth God’s person” (L40.14/326). Those powers include all the familiar powers of sovereignty, the right of interpretation of Scripture, the right to appoint church ministers, the right to control the support given to those ministers.

Then, as in Hobbes’ time, people failed to recognize this unity of powers, “And from thence proceeded from time to time the civil troubles, divisions, and calamities of the nation.” (L40.12/324). A confusion of the rights of sovereignty, as history (and not just theory) clearly shows, leads to civil war, and violent death. “Hobbes found in history what

theory had already proved,” writes Sommerville, namely, “The Jews gave undivided sovereignty to their ruler because sovereignty was indivisible.”²⁷⁵

Jesus and the World to Come

Christ’s “office” has three parts, redeemer, teacher, and king. While Christ was on earth for the first time he only played two roles: redeemer and teacher. Both of these roles are conditions for the third. As redeemer, Christ’s death allowed humanity to be saved from eternal death. Also, Jesus worked “by teaching and by working of miracles, to persuade and prepare men to live so as to be worthy of the immortality believers were to enjoy, at such time as he should come in majesty to take control of his Father’s kingdom.” (L41.4/329)

In his capacity as teacher, Jesus assumed no civil powers, nor did he challenge the civil powers in any way. Hobbes writes:

The kingdom he claimed was to be in another world; he taught all men to obey, in the meantime, them that sat in Moses’ seat; he allowed them to give to Caesar his tribute, and refused to take upon himself to be a judge. How, then, could his words or actions be seditious, or tend to the overthrow of their then civil government? (L41.5/330)

Note that Jesus Christ, as Hobbes describes him, wholly conforms to Hobbes’ definition of a prophet—one who works miracles in the name of the true religion, who does not challenge the reigning power.

The critical point is that the third and final aspect of His office, that of king, is reserved until after the Final Judgment. Christ assumed no civil authority and gave no such powers to His disciples—*Christ did not create a Kingdom of God on earth when he came for the first time*. In fact, although Hobbes claims that Christ *as teacher* was akin to Moses, and served

²⁷⁵ Sommerville, “Hobbes, Selden, Erastianism, and the History of the Jews”, pg. 180.

under God, considered as the Father, as his representative on earth (L41.9/333), Christ did not rule, but rather represented God in order to maintain continuity of that representation. If it sounds confusing, it is. Hobbes would return to these matters to try and make sense of them. If we take him at his word, these attempts were in vain. If we read between the lines, perhaps something else is afoot.

We have already discussed the dynamics of this final era in our discussion of mortalism in the previous chapter.

Power Ecclesiastical, Part I: The Church before Christian Sovereigns

Chapter 42, “Power Ecclesiastical” is Hobbes’ lengthy discussion of the church in the current age, the most relevant for his argumentation. Both the chapter on the ancient Israelites and the kingdom to come are short, include for reasons mostly of intellectual completeness, and in the case of Moses, precedent. The chapter consists of three broad sections. First Hobbes considers the church government of the early Church, in the era before the sovereign power professed Christianity. Then, Hobbes considers the church after the conversion of sovereigns to Christianity, and concludes that the sole authority in religion lies with the sovereign. But in the final part, he pays special attention to the claims of the Pope, as articulated by Cardinal Bellarmine, that he alone is the head of the Christian Church. Unsurprisingly, Hobbes finds the papal argumentation unconvincing in the slightest.

The 12 Apostles and 70 disciples picked up the role, and represent the person, of the Holy Spirit after Christ’s ascension. But the early church had no right (nor obligation) to resist the existing powers, nor did the commission of the leaders of the early church give them any power over their congregations. Hobbes notes that “the time between the

ascension and the general resurrection is called, not a reigning, but a regeneration, that is, a preparation of men for the second and glorious coming of Christ” (L42.7/337).

Recall first Hobbes’ distinction between a counsel and a command. A counsel, “is where a man saith *do*, or *do not this*, and deduceth his reasons from the benefit that arriveth by it to him to whom he saith it.” (L25.3/166) A counsel is advice, and lacks coercive power. It attempts to persuade on the basis of the listener’s own good. A command, by contrast, “is where a man say *do this*, or *do not this*, without expecting other reason than the will of him that says it.” (L25.2/165) Laws are commands of the sovereign power.

Hobbes systematically argues that at no point did the apostles ever possess or aspire to legal authority. He considers the duties of their office, the practice of conversion, the acceptance of the New Testament as a canon, the role of councils, and the organization of the early church.

The proper teaching of the church is to submit to the governing powers, even if they are infidels. An ordinary Christian is under no obligation to martyr him- or herself for the faith to defy such a regime, in fact, quite the contrary. Hobbes cites the example of Naaman, who denied his faith in public but kept to it in his heart, to support his claim. God specifically calls those who He wants to be martyrs to His cause; all others need only follow in their hearts.

For those who find this doctrine “repugnant”, Hobbes poses a thought experiment. Imagine a devout Muslim in a Christian country, whose sovereign demands he publicly profess Christianity (or suffer death). Should the Muslim profess Christian religion or not? What would an observer say? “If he say, he ought to suffer death, then he authorizeth all

private men to disobey their princes, in maintenance of their religion, true or false” (L42.11/339). For Hobbes this is unthinkable, a clear violation of the natural law. If the observer picks profession of Christianity, then they concede Hobbes’ point.

Hobbes reviews the Scriptural commission of the Apostles, and by extension, their “substitutes and successors” (L42.19/343) in the early church. The disciples of Christ were given a commission to perform five responsibilities. These were to: (a) preach, (b) teach, (c) baptize, (d) forgive sins, and (e) to excommunicate when necessary. Being a martyr was *never* a general responsibility for the ministers of the faith.

Preaching is “that act by which a crier, herald, or other officer useth to do publicly in proclaiming of a king.” (L42.16/341) It lacks entirely the power of command. *Teaching* is much the same as preaching. It is a counsel “that they shall do wisely to expect the coming of Christ hereafter, in patience, and faith, with obedience to their present magistrates.” (L42.17/342) *Baptism* is the symbol of the regeneration of the sinner. It is a promise of loyalty in the kingdom to come and represents no disobedience to the powers that currently hold sway. Baptism paves the way for the *forgiveness of sins*.

But the forgiveness of sins is not an absolute power, but is granted to the apostles on the basis of “the outward marks of repentance” (L42.19/343) which are determined not by an individual but by the assembled Church (ibid./344). Forgiveness was pronounced by an individual priest, as a *prolocutor*, that is, only on the basis of the agreement of the assembled Church. This last point is important for Hobbes’ argument, and he bolsters it with several passages from St. Paul. The remission of sins was a communal affair, based on its democratic acceptance of the sinner’s repentance. No one individual was singled out to make

the decision for the group. The prolocutor merely gave the groups' decision: he was a mouthpiece, not an executive.

Those whose sins are not forgiven are to be cast out, or *excommunicated*. Hobbes leaves his discussion of the power of excommunication for last because it is one of the most important for his purposes, and because it mattered very highly to his contemporaries. "In the late 1640s and early 1650s – at the time when *Leviathan* was being written and published – debate on church-state relations focused on the clergy's power to excommunicate."²⁷⁶ All of the clerical authorities of Hobbes' time claimed for themselves alone the power of excommunication; a power which they claimed could deny eternal salvation to the excommunicate.

On Hobbes' reading, excommunication in the early Church "was no more than that they who were not excommunicate were to avoid the company of them that were." (L42.21/345). A Church could physically refuse to admit someone from their assembly house, but on analogy with a private dwelling, not as a matter of assuming coercive power. "Excommunication, therefore, had its effect only upon those who believed that Jesus Christ was yet to come again in glory" (L42.24/346). Excommunication was "a delivery of the excommunicate person to Satan" (ibid.).

Hobbes asserts that excommunication "was used only for a correction of *manners*, not of errors of *opinion*" (ibid., emphasis mine). The Scripture counsels believers to "Avoid foolish questions," by which Hobbes infers that "all such places as command avoiding such disputes are written for a lesson to pastors...not to make new articles of faith by determining

²⁷⁶ Sommerville, "Hobbes, Selden, Erastianism, and the History of the Jews", pg. 163.

every small controversy, which oblige men to a needless burden of conscience or provoke them to break the union of the Church.” (L42.25/347)²⁷⁷ Hobbes notes that Peter and Paul did not excommunicate one another, “though there controversy were great”, but lesser clergy were guilty of this, and “so early it was that vain glory and ambition had found entrance into the Church of Christ.” (ibid.)

Excommunication can only happen where there is a “commonalty”—“For where there is no community, there can be no excommunication” (L42.26/347). Hence, there can be no excommunication of another Church. Since subjects *must* associate with their sovereign, there can likewise be no meaningful excommunication with one’s rightful ruler.

The power does not work on a true believer: “he that believeth Jesus to be the Christ is free from all the dangers threatened to persons excommunicate.” (L42.29/348)

Hence, the threat of excommunication, “when it wanteth the assistance of the civil power (as it doth, when a Christian state or prince is excommunicate by a foreign authority), is without effect, and consequently, ought to be without terror.” (L42.31/349)

The “thunderbolt of excommunication” often invoked by the pope is mistaken. First because it assumes that kingdom of god is of this world, and second that the pope is king of the present spiritual kingdom. Incidentally, it relies on the metaphor of pope as Jupiter, hurling his thunderbolts and disobedient mortals, a theme which Hobbes will repeat throughout the second half of *Leviathan*.

²⁷⁷ If such controversies were a distraction to the early Church, and carried no weight back then, they pose a similar danger to the present state of belief, and should likewise be avoided. That minimalist doctrine, the Jesus is the Christ, is sufficient. See my discussion in Chapter 4.

All of this amounts to saying that Church's independent power of excommunication is far weaker than maintained, and does not constitute the true "keys to the kingdom".

So in summation, none of the points of the commission of the clergy gave them sovereign-like authority nor did it give them a special place apart from the community that acclaimed them.

The early Christians faced two groups with the hopes of converting them to their religion: the Jews and the pagan Gentiles. For the Jewish people, the early Christians has to reason on the basis of the Old Testament to demonstrate that Christ was the Messiah.

Paul came to the Jews without any legal authority and effected conversions, "by reasoning from the already received Scripture." (L42.32/349) No one could be forced to agree with his opinions, but the Jews did accept the Old Testament as an authority. Hence, at that time "every one might believe or not believe, according as the allegations seemed to himself to be agreeable or not agreeable to the meaning of the places alleged." (L42.33/350) This freedom of interpretation will disappear after the conversion of kings, but the early Church was far more democratic and tolerant in nearly every aspect as we have seen.

The apostles again converted unbelieving Gentiles, not by force, but by first, using natural reasoning against pagan beliefs and second, testifying to the uprightness of Christ's life and his mission, in other words, the truth of revelation.

With regard to their opponents, Hobbes argues that the apostles could not "call for fire from heaven to destroy them, nor compel them to obedience by the sword. In all which there is nothing of power, but of persuasion." (L42.44/355)

Hobbes summarizes,

Seeing, them, our Savior and his apostles left not new laws to oblige us in this world, but new doctrine to prepare us for the next, the books of the New Testament, which contain that doctrine, until obedience to them was command by them that God had given power on earth to be legislators, were not obligatory canons, that is, laws, but only good and safe advice, for the direction of sinners in the way to salvation, which every man might take and refuse at his own peril, without injustice. (L42.43/355)

The early church formed councils to decide, locally, certain controversial issues. But, as Hobbes reminds us, “the acts of the councils of the apostles were then no laws, but counsels” (L42.47/357).

How, then did the New Testament become canonical? “Canon” to Hobbes is ambiguous, because a canon implies that there is a rule in place. But there can be rules given by a teacher, that possess only persuasive influence, and there can be rules given by a sovereign which possess coercive power. As we have seen, the former are called counsels and only the latter are called laws. Before the conversion of kings, the books of the New Testament were only the former, and “it was not the apostles that made their own writings canonical, but every convert made them so to himself.” (L42.42/354) The Old Testament, by way of comparison, was canonical in the second sense only when the sovereign of the Jews, Moses and the high priests, made it the case, otherwise, they were canonical merely in the first sense, as advice (see L42.37–41/351–4).

One of Hobbes’ crucial points is that the early church had a flexible, informal, organization, not a rigid hierarchy dictated by Sacred Scripture . Hobbes notes that in the early church there were both magisterial and ministerial positions. Magisterial officers were responsible for missionary work to unbelievers, administering the sacraments, and instruction of the converted.

The first order of magisterial officers were the 12 Apostles, who all saw Jesus in person. To this select group, Judas was subtracted, and three more members were added, Matthew (Matthias), Paul, and Barnabas. Matthew was chosen by his congregation to replace Judas. Barnabas had seen Christ before his ascension. Paul saw God in a vision on the road to Damascus. Paul and Barnabas were “chosen and authorized (not by the first apostles alone, but) by the Church of Antioch, as Matthias was chosen and authorized by the Church of Jerusalem.” (L42.53/359). So, aside from the original twelve, all the remaining apostles were “ratified” in some sense by the congregations.

The word “bishop” means “an overseer or superintendent of any business, and particularly a pastor or shepherd” (L42.54/359) and “presbyter” means simply an elder of the Church. These are all ordinary words, not official titles. They all simply connote respect, and are synonymous with one another. Hobbes argues that “it is evident that *bishop*, *pastor*, *elder*, *doctor*, that is to say, *teacher*, were but so many divers names of the same office in the time of the apostles.” (ibid.) The names were given official status in a hierarchy by the later church, but for Hobbes, this represents a corruption of the informal honorifics of the early church. All of the titles mentioned in the New Testament are like this. “For there was then no government by coercion, but only by doctrine and persuading.” (ibid.) So in addition to attempting to grab coercive authority, the later church would use these titles to legitimize that trespass.

Hobbes argues then, that as “the apostles Matthias, Paul, and Barnabas were not made by our Savior himself, but were elected by the Church...so were also the *presbyters* and

pastors in other cities elected by the Churches of those cities.” (L42.56/360)²⁷⁸ Hobbes repeats this point several times in his discussion, whether he is discussing the election of elders or of bishops. The church as a whole, not some special class apart, picked its officers. (When the church acquires a single spokes-person, in Hobbes’ technical sense of person,²⁷⁹ only that authority will pick the officers).

Ministerial officers, deacons, handled the day-to-day secular affairs of the church. The magisterial officers served Christ, while the deacons served the needs of the assembly. They too were elected by the members of their Church.

As for the financial support provided for the church, Hobbes observes,

in the time of the apostles, so also all the time downward, till after Constantine the Great, we shall find that the maintenance of the bishops and pastors of the Christian Church was nothing but voluntary contributions of them that embraced their doctrine. There was yet no mention of tithes. (L42.64/365)

Hobbes systematically and Scripturally undercuts any claims by the church as now constituted to direct divine sanction of its particular organization or independence. Tithes are not a Scriptural entitlement for a special clerical class. Sommerville notes that Hobbes here seems to be relying, at least partly, on John Selden’s *History of Tithes* (1618), a much more systematic work that reaches similar conclusions.²⁸⁰

What is implied here is a scathing critique of three of the four contenders (Roman Catholicism, Anglican Episcopacy, and Presbyterianism) for Christian ecclesiology in Hobbes’ time; only Independency is spared from this argument.²⁸¹ Whether bishops/pastors

²⁷⁸ Remember that, for Hobbes, pastor is equivalent to bishop, and presbyter is equivalent to elder. Pastor and elder connote the same thing as well.

²⁷⁹ See Chapter 16 of *Leviathan*.

²⁸⁰ See Sommerville, *Political Ideas in Historical Context*, pg. 123.

²⁸¹ Independency gets its own share of abuse later on. As we shall see, Hobbes was not an Independent either.

or elders/presbyters, the titles are arbitrary and historical, they are not officially endorsed by Scripture. At the very worst, they represent a power grab by greedy clerics.

As far as a historical narrative works, Hobbes' account of the early Christian Church runs into difficulties under conditions where the Church is outlawed altogether. "Hobbes's theory implies that when sovereigns did not simply ignore but actually prohibited Christianity, such assemblies were unlawful and seditious conventicles." A church becomes "an alarmingly nebulous entity" under such conditions.²⁸² The problem also applies to contemporary non-Christian societies. But Hobbes either ignores this seeming inconsistency or he leaves it as a skeptical implication for his more astute readers. It matters less for past institutions, because Christianity is a preponderant sociological fact in Hobbes' world. But for Christian missionaries and Christian minorities, it presents a deeper theoretical challenge.

Power Ecclesiastical, Part II: The Era of Christian Sovereigns

Much changes when sovereigns become Christians. All that had previously been counsel could now become coercive law, with the force of a command behind it. All of the disorganized and diversified worship could become unified and authorized. The merely persuasive, democratic character of the early Church gets switched out for the coercive will of the sovereign. A mob becomes a person. The Church is subsumed into the state structure, like any other component corporate body.²⁸³

²⁸² Sommerville, *op cit.*, pg. 126–7.

²⁸³ It is worth analyzing, though I do not have the space for it here, the discussion of "Systems Subject, Private and Political" in Chapter 22 of *Leviathan*, to see what a Church would look like if construed as a "system" like any other.

The power of sovereignty includes absolute discretion over what doctrines are permissible within a commonwealth, and what doctrines will be taught there. Since a teacher can be said to be a pastor, it is not unfair to call heathen sovereigns *pastors* of their people. This is even more apparent for Christian kings. Hobbes observes, “This right of heathen kings cannot be thought taken away from them by their conversion to the faith of Christ...And, therefore, Christian kings are still supreme pastors of their people, and have power to ordain what pastors they please” (L42.68/367). This power is essential to the sovereign’s power, for “if he give away the government of doctrines, men will be frightened into rebellion by fear of spirits.” (L18.15/115).

Hobbes writes, “when an assembly of Christians choose their pastor in a Christian commonwealth, it is the sovereign that electeth him, because it is done by his authority” (L42.69/367). In other words, if the sovereign permits a pastor to be elected, it is the same as if the sovereign did it himself. But this can *only* happen with the sovereign’s permission: if he were to reject the procedure or the results, he is well within his power. The sovereign’s benign tolerance of quasi-independent elections is not a transfer of his right.

From its powers as supreme pastor, it follows that all other pastors derive their authority from the sovereign, and rule in its stead and at its discretion, *just as with any other kind of subordinate minister*. There is nothing special or distinctive about the office of the clergy in this sense.

Here is the crucial move,

All pastors, except the supreme, execute their charges in the right (that is, by the authority) of the civil sovereign, that is, *jure civili*. But the king and every other sovereign executeth his office of supreme pastor by immediate authority from God (that is to say, in God’s right, or *jure divino*). (L42.71/368)

Terminologically, the words “jure divino”, by divine law, were used by Catholics, Anglicans, and Presbyterians to refer to the sanction of their ecclesiology. Hobbes disputes their usage.

Hobbes draws a startling conclusion from this. If the sovereign is supreme pastor,

it seemeth that he hath also the authority, not only to preach (which perhaps no man will deny), but also to baptize and to administer the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and to consecrate both temples and pastors to God's service (which most men deny, partly because they use not to it, and partly because the administration of sacraments, and consecration of persons and places to holy uses, requireth the imposition of such men's hands as by the like imposition successively from the time of the apostles have been ordained to the like ministry). (L42.72/368–9)²⁸⁴

This is a bold move, one that challenges some of the established practices of both the Catholic and Anglican Churches. In those Churches, ordained priests were the only ones capable of administering sacraments, and ordination occurred by “imposition of hands” by an already ordained priest. The line of succession of ordination could supposedly be traced back to St. Peter, whom Christ ordained himself. Similar reasoning applied to the Presbyterians. Sovereigns may have been able to regulate Church affairs, but traditionally, they had to defer to ordained priests when it came to the sacraments.

Hobbes admits that it is rare for sovereigns to administer the sacraments and to consecrate, but this is not an argument against the sovereign having these powers, it is merely an explanation of why “it were not convenient for him to apply himself in person to that particular” (L42.73.369) but rather leave it up to his subordinates. The sovereign is simply too busy to take up these matters. Besides, Hobbes asks, when was the last time a pope or a bishop baptized anyone? Christ himself never baptized anyone. What is important for Hobbes is that the sovereign *could* wield these powers, should he decide. This was a

²⁸⁴ As we shall see, Hobbes only acknowledges two sacraments, baptism and Holy Communion.

radical idea. “By adopting this position Hobbes diverged not only from the Catholics, Anglicans and Presbyterians, but also from the Independents.”²⁸⁵

One of the important questions Hobbes faced from his conclusions was could a female monarch, like Elizabeth I, exercise full pastoral powers? Hobbes accepts the command of 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35, that women are forbidden to speak in Church.²⁸⁶ Hobbes asserts that “authority does not take account of masculine and feminine” (L42.78/372), and claims that whoever a female sovereign appointed to exercise clerical power was acting through her sovereign authority. Elizabeth herself, Hobbes recounts, signed an oath not to exercise the pastoral functions. This was to secure the allegiance of a few holdouts in the clergy who were concerned that the Act of Supremacy, and its attendant oath of submission, were tantamount to granting Elizabeth these powers. Hobbes observes: “It was clear from this misgiving that those ministers were all of the opinion that the authority to perform pastoral functions is always conjoined with supremacy over the church, but that its exercise is only suitable for men.” (ibid.) In effect, Hobbes is not really answering the question. He points out the only historical example, and shows how it does not really apply to the future.

This position on the pastoral powers of the sovereign created enough controversy for Hobbes that he revisited it in the Appendices of the Latin *Leviathan*. There, Hobbes repeats his assertion that kings can administer the pastoral functions, and that “Almost all those who were ministers of the church of England in the first year of Queen Elizabeth

²⁸⁵ Sommerville, *Political Ideas in Historical Context*, pg. 121.

²⁸⁶ The KJV states it thus, “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.”

agreed with him.” (LA3.34/546)²⁸⁷ Hobbes also reiterates his claim about Elizabeth’s public declaration, but argues this did not prevent later English sovereigns from exercising those powers. Curley points out that this is a distortion – the documents attest to a total renunciation of pastoral power for the monarch (see n26, *ibid.*/547). So Hobbes adds little if anything to the discussion, but the Appendices are a good way to tell what positions stuck out for Hobbes’ contemporary readers.

As regards the imposition of hands, Hobbes challenges that it is a crucial step in appointing a minister of the faith. It is certainly an ancient ritual, dating to the Old Testament, and it has strong value as a tradition. Hobbes further argues that it is “natural” to “design [i.e., *designate*] by the hand, to assure the eyes” than to use words alone in a ceremony (L42.76/370), but the ritual imparts no special powers. If a person had the power to teach before they became Christian, they retain that power after their baptism and merely teach Christian doctrine. Since a sovereign had that power, after the sovereign was baptized, they could and would now teach Christian doctrine. Baptism is all that is necessary; laying on of hands is extraneous. It has merely conventional value.

Hobbes’ argument bubbles with classic Erastian sentiment, “both State and Church are the same men.” (L42.79/372). But even though individual sovereigns are the head of the church of their respective nations, “If they please...they may (as many Christian kings now do) commit the government of their subjects in matters of religion to the Pope.” (L42.79/373) But that case, the governance is by the permission of the sovereign, and is by civil law (*jure civili*), not divine law (*jure divino*). In effect, the Pope is granted a license to teach

²⁸⁷ Hobbes refers to himself in the third person through the Appendices.

religion within the commonwealth, and that license can be restricted or revoked at any time for any reason.

Hobbes elaborates and generalizes this position, saying that sovereigns may, “if they please, commit the care of religion to one supreme pastor (or to an assembly of pastors), and give them what power over the Church, or one another, they think most convenient, and what titles of honor (as, of bishops, archbishops, priests, or presbyters) they, and make such laws for their maintenance (either by tithes or otherwise) as they please” (ibid.) subject to the same civil discretion. He reaffirms, “a Church and a commonwealth are the same thing.” (ibid.) The sovereign makes Scripture into law and gives excommunication its bite.

The upshot of all of this is Hobbes’ categorical rejection of any independent basis for Church structure, inhering in either reason or Scripture. The sovereign is free to do exactly as it pleases, because only it reigns by laws, by the laws of nature and *jure divino*. It can change its mind at any time. Its conscience is beholden only to God himself (L42.80/373).

Hobbes faced very real opponents. “During the 1630’s Archbishop Laud and his associates claimed that bishops derived their spiritual powers from God alone.”²⁸⁸ The royalist Church in exile maintained these same opinions. Hobbes was to have his fair share of run-ins with these latter. The experience would embitter him.

Power Ecclesiastical, Part III: The Power of the Pope: Bellarmine and Beyond

The challenge of the papal power represents a special case for Hobbes. The papacy claims for itself several problematic powers, which Hobbes is determined to refute. First, the

²⁸⁸ Sommerville, “Hobbes, Selden, Erastianism, and the History of the Jews”, pg. 164.

papacy claims exclusive and universal jurisdiction over a distinct spiritual realm; it asserts its infallibility on matters of religious doctrine; further, in the name of this authority it grants itself the right to excommunicate (and thereby depose) sovereigns. Hobbes chooses Cardinal Robert Bellarmine's exemplary treatise, *De Summo Pontifice*, as his target in the final section of Chapter 42.²⁸⁹ Patricia Springborg calls Bellarmine's work "the definitive defense of papal power" and there is plenty of support for this claim from contemporary observers.²⁹⁰ Furthermore, there is evidence for the work's importance simply in the way Hobbes addresses it. Bellarmine's work is treated by Hobbes with a depth and care that is only rivaled by his analysis of the Bible!²⁹¹ No other author in *Leviathan* receives anything like this level of detail in refutation. Hobbes confesses to have dealt with Bellarmine at such exhaustive length because he views him "as the champion of the Papacy against all other Christian Princes and States." (L42.135/397). Springborg is even more candid: "The Papacy was anti-Leviathan to Hobbes".²⁹² As well shall see, the papacy becomes a stand-in for any sect that denies the supremacy of the civil authority in all matters.

²⁸⁹ The treatise, whose title means "On the supreme pontiff" is the third part of a much larger work, entitled *Disputationes de Controversiis Christianae Fidei adversus hujus temporis hereticos* ("Disputations of the controversies of the Christian faith against the heresies of our time"), written from 1581–1592. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, while not a neutral authority, refers to the work thusly: "This monumental work was the earliest attempt to systematize the various controversies of the time, and made an immense impression throughout Europe, the blow it dealt to Protestantism being so acutely felt in Germany and England that special chairs were founded in order to provide replies to it. Nor has it even yet been superseded as the classical book on its subject-matter" (accessed at: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02411d.htm> [..]) Hobbes was not alone in his attempt at refutation. Theodor Beza also wrote a reply. Bellarmine was later sainted by the Roman Catholic Church, although there was some controversy between him and Pope Sixtus V regarding the extent of papal power. Bellarmine, in fact, was too restrained in his doctrine of indirect power for Sixtus, who placed the book on the Index of banned books for a period! Bellarmine, as Sommerville points out in *Thomas Hobbes: Political Ideas in Historical Context*, had first contributed to the debate on the Venetian interdict, with which Hobbes was closely familiar from his Italian contacts.

²⁹⁰ Springborg, "Hobbes and Bellarmine", pg. 506 n12 (I thank the Wikipedia article for drawing this to my attention).

²⁹¹ This does not mean, however, that Hobbes does not distort Bellarmine's meaning nor simply lampoon his arguments at times. See "Hobbes and Bellarmine", especially Sects. II and III.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, pg. 518.

Hobbes seems to employ many of the common arguments against the papacy in general, and Bellarmine in particular, used by his countrymen in their battle of ideas with the Holy See. Sommerville observes, “A great deal of what Hobbes had to say against the theories of Bellarmine and other Catholics had already been said by Anglican writers.”²⁹³

By way of summary, *De Summo Pontifice* consists of five books. The first Book argues that Peter was the monarch of the Church. The second argues that Peter was the bishop of Rome, and that the Popes are Peter’s legitimate successors. The third Book refutes the argument that the Pope is the Antichrist. The fourth aims to “prove the Pope to be the supreme judge in all questions of faith and manners” (L42.89/378). Lastly, the fifth Book gives Bellarmine’s wider conclusions, of which most important is that the Pope has supreme, *indirect* temporal power, “that thereby he hath a right to change kingdoms, giving them to one, and taking them from another, when he shall think it conduces to the salvation of souls” (L42.121/390–1).

Hobbes takes the central point of the first Book to be to “prove St. Peter to have been the monarch universal of the Church, that is to say, of all the Christians in the world” (L42.85/376).²⁹⁴ In support of this, Bellarmine cites Matthew 16:18–19, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church....And I will give thee the keys of heaven...” As for the claim that Peter was the rock upon which Christ would build his Church, Hobbes widens the context to the earlier discussion, arguing that the “stone” referred to was “faith in Christ”—the foundational belief for the Christian Church. “Thou art Peter”, if correctly

²⁹³ Sommerville, “Leviathan in its Anglican Context”, pg. 363

²⁹⁴ Bellarmine also argues for a divided/mixed sovereignty as the ideal type of government, incorporating elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, a conclusion which Hobbes obviously rejects on the basis of his earlier arguments. See L18.16/115–6, L19.1/118, and L42.82/374.

translated, would be rendered “Thou art *Stone* (a surname)”, and it merely a play on words using the Saint’s surname. Hobbes interprets the gift of the “keys of heaven” to be given to “all supreme pastors” and not to Peter exclusively. Later on, Hobbes comments that the passage proves “no more than that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the confession of Peter which gave the occasion to that speech: namely this, that ‘Jesus is Christ the Son of God.’” (L42/91/379).

The second Book claims Peter was bishop of Rome (understood as “monarch of the Church or the supreme pastor of it”) and that the Popes are Peter’s successors (L42.86/376). Hobbes contends that Constantine, the first Christian emperor, properly held this title of head of the Church of Rome, noting: “I say of the Roman empire, not of all Christendom” (L42.86/376). While Rome was large and powerful, it is a mistake to equate it with the whole world, argues Hobbes. There were Christians at the time who were not Romans, and *their* sovereigns were their supreme pastors. Before sovereigns were converted, there was no monarch or supreme pastor.

Hobbes (perhaps surprisingly) *agrees* with the third Book’s conclusion, that the Pope (that is, the office of the papacy) is not the Antichrist, despite the prevalence of this belief among Protestant religious authorities and among the masses of his time.²⁹⁵ Hobbes interprets Scripture to give two signs as to the identity of the Antichrist: (1) that he denies that Jesus is the Christ and instead (2) asserts himself as the Christ. From this second point it follows that he is an adversary of “Jesus the true Christ” (L42.87/377, italics removed).

²⁹⁵ See Lake, Peter “Antippery: The structure of a prejudice” for a detailed analysis of this phenomenon.

Furthermore, the Antichrist will give rise to a tribulation which will precede the Second Coming. The Pope fails to meet all three of these criteria.

The last two Books of Bellarmine's treatise elicit more involved arguments from Hobbes. The fourth Book argues for the supremacy of the Pope's judgment in matters of faith and manners. Bellarmine bases this on three propositions: (1) the Pope is infallible, (2) that the Pope can make true (read universal) laws and punish their transgression, and finally, (3) that Jesus himself conferred mastery over "all jurisdiction ecclesiastical" to the Pope, and not to bishops or other clerical representatives (*ibid.*). Hobbes observes that this conclusion is tantamount to claiming that the Pope is "the absolute monarch of all Christians in the world" (L42.89/378, *italics removed*)—clearly an unacceptable conclusion for an English absolutist!

Bellarmino advances four Scriptural passages designed to show the Pope's infallibility (1) in matters of Faith: Luke 23:31–32, "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired you that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren"; Matthew 16:18 (cited above as well); John 21:16–17, "Feed my sheep"; and Exodus 28:30, "Thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment, the Urim and the Thummim" ("evidence" and truth"). Hobbes rejects all four as overstating the case.

As regards papal infallibility in manners²⁹⁶, Bellarmine quotes John 16:13, "When the Spirit of truth is come, he will lead you into all truth". Bellarmine reads "all truth" to mean all the truths necessary to salvation. But if this is the case, Hobbes responds, "he attributeth

²⁹⁶ Recall that for Hobbes, the most relevant use of the word "manners" is to mean "those qualities of mankind that concern their living together in peace and unity." (See L11.1/57)

no more infallibility to the Pope than to any man that professeth Christianity” (L42.94/30)! Given Hobbes’ requirements for salvation, this requires inerrancy on a very minimal article of faith anyway.

Bellarmino also argues that if the Church was commanded to follow the Pope, then he would have to be infallible in matters of salvific import, because otherwise, the Church would not have been sufficiently insulated from error. Hobbes mockingly rejects this, because Christ never commanded anyone to obey Peter as a sovereign, let alone his alleged successors! Subjects are to obey their civil sovereigns. Further, since “it hath not been declared by the [Roman] Church, nor by the Pope himself, that he is the civil sovereign of all the Christians in the world...all Christians are not bound to acknowledge his jurisdiction in points of manners.” (L42.96/381). If the Pope demands the right to determine manners, he has overstepped his bounds, teaching “an erroneous doctrine, contrary to the many precepts of our Savior and his apostles delivered to us in the Scripture.” (ibid.) And to hammer the point home, the requirements for salvation are *easy* to fulfill.

Bellarmino cites no less than thirteen passages to support his claim that the Pope can make laws that are valid for all Christians (2).²⁹⁷ There is no need to rehearse the counterarguments in detail. All of them hinge on Bellarmino’s failure, in Hobbes opinion, to make certain critical distinctions between the commission of a teacher and that of a sovereign, or in other words between a counsel and a law. Hobbes displays his virtuosity with Scriptural exegesis. A representative passage is from Second Thessalonians 3:14, “If any

²⁹⁷ The complete list is, in order of discussion: Deuteronomy 17:12, Matthew 16:19, John 21:16, John 20:21, Acts 15:28, Romans 13, First Corinthians 4:21, Timothy 3:2, Timothy 5:19, Luke 10:16, First Corinthians 11:2 (along with First Thessalonians 4:2), Second Thessalonians 3:14 and Hebrews 13:17.

man obey not our word by this Epistle, note than man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed”. Hobbes argues that Paul “does not bid kill him that disobeys, nor beat, nor imprison, nor amerce [fine] him (which legislators may all do), but avoid his company, that he may be ashamed. Whereby it is evident it was not the empire of an apostle, but his reputation amongst the faithful, which Christians stood in awe of.” (L42.108/386). The word “obey” in the passage, argues Hobbes, is ambiguous in the original Greek, and can be take to mean either a true command, or as in the case in question, a piece of advice.

Bellarmino’s attempts to argue for the superiority of the Pope in all matters of ecclesiastical jurisdiction (3), have in fact the ironic result for Hobbes that ultimately, “all bishops receive jurisdiction, when they have it, from the civil sovereigns” (L42.112/388). Bellarmine’s first fault, in Hobbes’ eyes, is that he does not consider the question of the relationship between the Pope and other civil sovereigns, but only the relationship between the bishops and the Pope. He fails to tackle the real problem, that of papal supremacy.

Bellarmino first argues that bishops rule *de jure divino*, “in the right of God”, but only mediately, through the Pope’s consent (L42.110/387). Hobbes’ incredulous response is, “if a man may be said to have his jurisdiction *de jure divino*, and yet not immediately, what lawful jurisdiction (though but civil) is there in a Christian commonwealth that is not also *de jure divino*? For Christian kings have their power from God immediately”. Hence, “either he [Bellarmino] must grant every constable in the state to hold his office in the right of God, or he must not hold that any bishop holds his so, besides the Pope himself.” (ibid.). *De jure divino* either applies to the sovereign alone or it applies in such a wide and attenuated way that it is meaningless.

This is a swipe at the Anglican tradition as well, which took the powers of bishops to be *de jure divino*, and used precisely this sort of language to argue for it, such that although bishops in the Anglican Church needed to be appointed by the sovereign, they maintained a sort of independence, a responsibility that was directly to God. Hobbes claimed that this was at its core a subterfuge, so that bishops could “deny to have received their authority from the civil state, and slyly slip off the collar of their civil subjection, contrary to the unity and defense of the commonwealth.” (L42.71/368, quoted by Sommerville below). In fact, the attack is even wider. Sommerville observes, “This criticism of the bishops of course worked equally against all other religious groups that claimed churches or ministers have spiritual or ecclesiastical functions distinct from the temporal or civil authority of the state – and so against Presbyterians, Independents and Catholics, amongst others.”²⁹⁸ With this one move, Hobbes rebuts the defenders of all the main competitors to ecclesiastical organization. Sommerville elsewhere adds the following about Hobbes’ method, that he “treats Presbyterian and Anglican views on the clergy’s power as modified versions of Bellarmine’s theory, arguing that they incorporated some but not all of its errors. So a refutation of Bellarmine would simultaneously demolish the mistaken opinions of Presbyterians and Anglicans.”²⁹⁹

As a general observation, we can not that Hobbes seems to have buried his most trenchant insights and criticisms in places where the casual (or simply lazy) reader would not discover them.

²⁹⁸ Sommerville, “Leviathan in Its Anglican Context”, pg. 367.

²⁹⁹ Sommerville, *Political Ideas in Historical Context*, pg. 114.

In all, Bellarmine makes seven more arguments for the supreme jurisdiction of the Pope over bishops, arguments which Hobbes find illuminating because absent Bellarmine's (ungrounded, for Hobbes) assertions about papal supremacy, these arguments are *against* episcopal power and serve Hobbes' purposes.

Of these seven, the fourth and sixth add the most to our understanding of Hobbes' position. In the former, Bellarmine argues that if God had given bishops their jurisdictions directly, they would possess equality in the extent of their domains. Since this is clearly not the case, Bellarmine concludes that the jurisdiction of bishops is allocated by some mediate power. The argument only works for Bellarmine's purposes, argues Hobbes, if the Pope has universal jurisdiction over all Christians. "But seeing that hath not been proved, and that it is notoriously known, the large jurisdiction of the Pope was given to him by those that had it, that is, by the emperors of Rome...it followeth that all other bishops have their jurisdiction from the sovereigns of the place wherein they exercise the same. And as for that cause they have not their authority *de jure divino*, so neither hath the Pope his *de jure divino*, except only where he is also the civil sovereign." (L42.117/389).

Bellarmino makes the latter argument by demanding of bishops that they point to a place in Scripture that proves they rule *de jure divino*. Both Hobbes and Bellarmine agree there is none, the difference being that Hobbes thinks the same applies to the Pope as well. In general, Hobbes maintains that there simply is no Scriptural evidence for a uniquely specified church government, nor does he believe Scripture lends any support to an independence of clerical organization.

Hobbes' responses to Book Five is in many a watershed for his political theory, leveraging many other key points of his theory to make his most devastating attack on papal authority. Hobbes states that the fifth Book reaches four conclusions: (1) The Pope is not the sovereign of all the world; nor (2) is he the sovereign of all the Christian world; (3) he does not have direct temporal jurisdiction; but, (4) he has supreme indirect temporal jurisdiction. Of the first three Hobbes accepts with a smirk that "These three conclusions are easily granted." (L42.121/390).³⁰⁰

Hobbes jokes that if by indirect power, Bellarmine implies the Pope got his power indirectly (that is, through subterfuge), he will grant that as well. But that is not what Bellarmine intends. Hobbes glosses the point as follows: "to the pastoral power (which he calls spiritual) the supreme power civil is necessarily annexed; and that thereby he hath a right to change kingdoms, giving them to one, and taking them from another, when he shall think it conduces to the salvation of souls." (L42.121/390–1).

Throughout *Leviathan*, Hobbes has argued "that the right of all sovereigns is derived originally from the consent of every one of those that are to be governed" whether by institution or acquisition (L42.123/391). This rule by consent is the only way to make sense of direct temporal power. If the Pope does not assert direct power over commonwealths, he does not claim to rule by the consent of the governed, but rather "by a right given him by God (which he calleth *indirectly*) in his assumption of the papacy." (ibid.) The power is essentially unlimited as stated, argues Hobbes, and the Pope claims to be able to depose kings whenever he feels the salvation of the people is endangered. He is answerable to no

³⁰⁰ The situation is a little more complicated. See L42.121/390–1n82 for details. While Hobbes alters Bellarmine's presentation, he does not change the substance of his claims in any serious way.

one else in this judgment, asserts Bellarmine. History certainly offers several instances of this power being used, notes Hobbes. But *is* does not imply *ought*. Hobbes argues pointedly, echoing L18.16, where he decried the split of power between parliament and the crown which lead to civil chaos:

I think there be few princes that consider not this as unjust and inconvenient. But I wish they would all resolve to be kings or subjects. Men cannot serve two masters. They ought, therefore, to ease them, either by holding the reins of government wholly in their own hands, or by wholly delivering them into the hands of the Pope, that such men as are willing to be obedient may be protected in their obedience. For this distinction of temporal and spiritual is but words. Power is as really divided, and as dangerously to all purposes, by sharing with another indirect power, as with a direct one. (L42.123/392)

Bellarmino gives us six arguments: (1) civil power is subject to spiritual power and supreme spiritual power entails ultimate power over civil authority; (2) since states have a right of self-defense in temporal matters, the same is more true in spiritual matters; (3) Christians should not obey heretical or pagan sovereigns, and the Pope is the proper judge of heresy; (4) when kings are baptized, they promise to defend the faith, and this means that they submit to papal authority; (5) Jesus commanded his apostles to “Feed my sheep”; and (6) historical examples abound of the exercise of this power by the Pope.

The first three arguments are the most important. What does it mean to say that temporal power is subordinate to spiritual power (1)? Hobbes argues, “when we say one power is subject to another power, the meaning either is that [a] he that hath the one is subject to him that hath the other, or that [b] one power is to the other, as the means to an end.” (L42.124/392). Subjection is a property of persons, not abstract powers. Powers are subordinate to other powers, merely as means, in “as the art of a saddler to the art of a rider.” (ibid.). Hobbes infers from this, “If, then, it be granted that the civil government be ordained as a means to bring us to spiritual felicity, yet it does not follow that if a king have

the civil power, and the Pope the spiritual, that therefore the king is bound to obey the Pope, more than every saddler is bound to obey every rider.” (ibid.). If this is what Bellarmine is doing, he is not beginning from proper definitions, and stumbling into absurdity. Bellarmine makes a false analogy, on of the basis of his obscure thinking. Anyway: “Philosophical justification for analogical argument took the form of the doctrine of essences...But the refutation of the doctrine of essences was what Hobbes’ nominalist system was geared to accomplish.”³⁰¹

Bellarmino founds this argument on two claims. First, that all Christians are members of one commonwealth, and second, that a commonwealth is like an organic unity, where the parts depend on one another in a hierarchy. Since spiritual things do not depend on temporal things, the reverse must be true. Hence, all Christians are subordinate to the power of the Pope. It is not surprising that Hobbes disputes both claims. Regarding the first, it is clear to Hobbes that there is more than one commonwealth in the world, and thus there are several churches. “And their several sovereigns represent them, whereby they are capable of commanding and obeying, of doing and suffering, as a natural man, which no general or universal Church is till it have a representant, which it hath not on earth.” (L42.124/393). Such a unity must wait until the second coming. We have seen how Hobbes has rejected the idea that the kingdom of God is here and now, and that this latter idea has been used to buttress clerical power of all varieties. As to the second claim, Hobbes argues that the members of a body do form a unity, “but they depend only on the sovereign, which is the soul of the commonwealth.” (ibid.). “Therefore, there is nothing in this similitude from when to infer a dependence of the laity on the clergy, or of the temporal offices on the

³⁰¹ Springborg, “Hobbes and Bellarmine”, pg. 522.

spiritual, but of both on the civil sovereign (which ought indeed to direct his civil commands to the salvation of souls, but is not therefore subject to any but God himself.” (ibid.) This is in part because *Leviathan* “is a spoof on all organic theories of the state” as the Introduction will attest.³⁰²

As for the argument from spiritual self-defense (2), Bellarmine notes that every state is entitled to depose another state’s government and substitute another of its own choosing if it “cannot otherwise defend itself against the injuries” the foreign government commits or seems likely to commit (L42.126/394, Hobbes quoting Bellarmine). This is even more justified when it comes to spiritual matters, argues Bellarmine. Hobbes has a two part response to this. Of course, Hobbes agrees, that nations have a right to defend themselves, “And if it were also true that there is now in this world a spiritual commonwealth, distinct from a civil commonwealth, then might the prince thereof, upon injury done him or upon want of caution that injury be not done him in tome to come, repair and secure himself by war” (ibid.). But even if we grant this, the argument cuts both ways, and hence “it would be no less lawful for a civil sovereign, upon like injuries done or feared, to make war upon the spiritual sovereign” (ibid.), a fact that surely Bellarmine would be reluctant to accept. The second part undercuts the whole basis for Bellarmine’s plans, “But spiritual commonwealth there is none in this world.” (L42.127/394). This is reserved for the period after the Second Coming. Only then, will humanity have “spiritual” bodies, bodies of persistent, gas-like materials. Any other meaning of the phrase is incoherent on the conditions of Hobbes’ materialism.

³⁰² Ibid., pg. 523.

Bellarmino argues (3) that Christians should not tolerate a non-Christian sovereign, nor a sovereign who professes to be Christian but who is a heretic. Since only the Pope can determine heresy, he is the one who can depose heretical rulers. Hobbes rejects both conclusions as false. He has already illustrated that the natural law and Scripture attest to the servitude of a subject, regardless of the religion of his or her sovereign. Furthermore, the natural law indicates that the only judge of heresy is the sovereign itself.

The only reason that Christians did not depose their earlier persecutors, like the pagan Roman emperors, was because they did not have the strength to do so, argues Bellarmine.

The absolutist, of course, disputes this. While there are probabilistic grounds for rejecting revolution, like for instance, that it leads to chaos, the state of nature, etc., Hobbes eschews them here. Bellarmine has already signaled a distaste for the violence of an unpopular revolution. Hobbes must stand on his principles.³⁰³ The issue is not one of practicality, ultimately, but of justice (which in Hobbes' definition is honoring one's covenants): "It is not, therefore, for want of strength, but for conscience sake, that Christians are to tolerate their heathen princes, or princes (for I cannot call any one whose doctrine is the public doctrine, an heretic) that authorize the teaching of an error." (L42.131/395). Moreover, "the danger that may arise to religion by the subjects tolerating of an heathen, or an erring prince, it is a point of which a subject is no competent judge" (ibid./396).

³⁰³ Although this does argument again raise the specter of whether Hobbes is a utilitarian or a deontologist. The argument here is deontological.

The last three arguments Hobbes dispenses with perfunctorily. As for royal baptism (4), Hobbes concedes Bellarmine's contention that sovereigns serve as Christ's lieutenants, "But they may, for all that, be the Pope's fellows; for they are supreme pastors of their own subjects, and the Pope is no more but king and pastor, even in Rome itself." (L42.132/396).

"Feed my sheep" from John 21:16, to Bellarmine entails the power to chase away "wolves" (heretics), to enclose "furious rams" (Christian kings that do not submit to the pastor), and the ability to feed the flock. Hobbes accepts the three roles, but finds nothing of the extent of power that Bellarmine does. Feeding the flock is teaching, which as we have seen, is non-coercive. As regards the wolves, Hobbes maintains that the correct interpretation is to retreat from them. Hobbes reiterates his point about the rams – that Christ never assumed this power for himself, nor did he grant it to Peter, nor did Peter confer it on the line of Popes.

From the use of historical examples (6), Hobbes concludes, "first that the examples prove nothing; secondly that the examples he allegeth make not so much as a probability of right." (L42.135/397). The extended critique of Bellarmine is finally at an end.

As Patricia Springborg highlights, Hobbes has more than political reasons for rejecting papal authority. There are also deep metaphysical issues for him as well, tied to the Catholic Church's reliance on Scholasticism and Aristotle. We will consider these objections later on.

Part of Hobbes' vitriol stems from his absolutism, but the anti-clerical nature of his attacks is rooted both in his personal experiences and his critique of human nature.

Comparison with the Earlier Works

A great deal of recent scholarship has attacked supposed discontinuities in Hobbes' works on the issues of Church-State relations and ecclesiology. (Hobbes' contemporaries also noted these changes, but I will not address those issues here).

Elements of Law argues that "the government of bishops *bath a divine pattern* in the twelve rules, and seventy elders of Israel, in the twelve apostles and seventy disciples of our Savior." (EL26.8/159, emphasis mine). This is a seeming divine endorsement (*de jure divino*) of episcopacy. Such a move takes away the discretion of the sovereign in these matters. Hobbes also notes that, "though kings take not upon them the ministerial priesthood (as they might if it pleased them) yet are they not merely laic, as not to have sacerdotal jurisdiction." (EL26.11/162), which implies that kings are not (at least automatically) pastors, and must undertake holy orders to administer the sacraments.³⁰⁴

De Cive argues that two things matter in the selection of church officials: (1) the process of selection and (2) the act of ordination. Hobbes argues that the selection is made by the church itself, as he also argues in *Leviathan*. At first this was democratic, and later it is the decision of the sovereign. The act of ordination, however, is specific to those already designated as church officials. He writes: "It is therefore incontestable that by the custom of the *Church* under the *Apostles*, while the *ordination*, or *consecration*, of all Ecclesiastics which is done by prayer and the laying-on of hands, *was the business of the Apostles and Teachers*, the *selection* of ordinands was the business of a Church." (DC17.24/224). So, here, Hobbes

³⁰⁴ See Sommerville, "Leviathan and Its Anglican Context" in *The Cambridge Companion to Leviathan*, pg. 370, and note 43. The argument does not exclude the sovereign from exercising pastoral functions, provided they are formally ordained, so it can be considered a middle ground between the apparent positions of *De Cive* and *Leviathan* (see below).

argues that ordination is something special and it is the province of the priesthood to administer it, even though they take their direction from the sovereign. The passage also seems to condone a priestly hierarchy of Apostles, Bishops, Elders/Presbyters/ordinary priest, absent only the Pope in the traditional scheme, which by implication is an espousal of the correctness of episcopacy.

Later on, Hobbes argues that while matters of natural reason are the sole responsibility of the sovereign to adjudicate, there are other matters that are beyond the scope of sovereign power:

But to decide questions of faith, i.e. questions *about God*, which are beyond human understanding, one need's God's blessing (so that we may not err, at least on essential questions) and this comes from CHRIST himself by *laying on of hands*. For our eternal salvation, we are obliged to accept a supernatural doctrine, which because it is supernatural, is impossible to understand. It would go against equity if we were left alone to err by ourselves on essential matters. Our Savior promised this Infallibility (in matters essential to salvation) to the *Apostles* until the day of judgment, i.e. to the *Apostles* and to the *Pastors* who were to be consecrated by the *Apostles* in succession by the *laying on of hands*. As a Christian, therefore, the holder of sovereign power in the commonwealth is obliged to interpret holy scripture, when it is a question about the *mysteries of faith*, by means of duly ordained Ecclesiastics. (DC17.28, 233).

Here Hobbes explicitly endorses the distinctive character of laying on of hands, invokes the idea of a strict and significant idea of apostolic succession, asserts clerical infallibility on matters essential to faith (for the reasons of equity), and argues that sovereign must accept the interpretation of these distinctively-ordained clerics on the matters of the mysteries of faith – all ideas Hobbes explicitly rejects in *Leviathan*. By implication, the sovereign is not the supreme pastor, and cannot perform the sacraments.

Hence, on certain important matters, Hobbes seems to have changed his mind, from a relatively mainstream conception of the national church as best represented by the distinctive features of Anglican episcopacy in the *Elements* and *De Cive*, to a much more

radical position in *Leviathan*. We need not disagree that Hobbes *liked* English episcopacy best, and thought it “the most commodious that a Christian King can use for governing Christ’s flock”, even later in life to see the transformation of ideas here.³⁰⁵ Richard Tuck observes, “the *Elements of Law* and *De Cive* do indeed set out a fundamentally orthodox Anglican theology, while *Leviathan* breaks dramatically with that tradition.”³⁰⁶

On the basis of this shift, Tuck argues that “effectively, what happened in *Leviathan* was that the sphere of natural religion...had expanded to include *all* religion: Christianity was no longer a special case, but a civil religion like the religions of antiquity.”³⁰⁷ On this basis, as Tuck argues in his typically polemical fashion, Hobbes had no choice but to turn to a deistic belief about god, and to a purely civil worship entirely under the control of the sovereign. Hobbes was now willing to jettison the appearance of orthodoxy for unspecified reasons, perhaps related to his own, heightened anti-clerical feelings.

Others do not draw such radical conclusions. Sommerville for one argues that “the basic theory on church-state relations expressed in *Leviathan* is the same as that put forward in *De Cive*. Arguably, Hobbes’ teaching on bishops and ordination is inconsistent with that theory, and was tacked on in order to conform to the sovereign’s wishes or to avert royalist criticism.”³⁰⁸ Sommerville points out, for instance, that the invocation of clerical Infallibility in *De Cive* is inconsistent, and ultimately seems to be a verbal concession that the sovereign’s actual powers eliminate.³⁰⁹ Ultimately, although *De Cive* exhibits a certain orthodoxy, “its Anglicanism was skin-deep, and on most of the fundamental questions relating to church

³⁰⁵ See the defense of his reputation against John Wallis. EW IV, pg. 432.

³⁰⁶ Tuck, “Hobbes’s ‘Christian Atheism’”, pg. 113.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., pg. 125.

³⁰⁸ Sommerville, *Thomas Hobbes: Political Ideas in Historical Context*, pg. 124.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., pg. 125.

government its teachings were close to those of *Leviathan*.”³¹⁰ Elsewhere, Sommerville also argues that the same argument applies to the differences mentioned in the *Elements*.³¹¹ Sommerville is not the only scholar who argues that Hobbes, despite appearances to the contrary, is actually in (or around) the mainstream of Anglican thinking of his time.³¹²

So what are we to make of these two alternatives? Was there a real transformation of Hobbes’ views? I tend to side with what might be called the conservative interpretation of Sommerville and others. Hobbes’ more conventional-seeming views in the earlier works do contain the seeds of the position in *Leviathan*. Certainly the latter work looks like a maturation of a view, written under conditions of greater freedom than his previous works. The intellectual climate of the post-civil war era was certainly less restrained.

At this point, I want to turn to an examination of Hobbes’ critique of religious rituals and Scholastic philosophy. These ideas necessitate a further critique of clerical motives as Hobbes understood them.

The Sacraments

Incorrect interpretations of the role and meaning of the sacraments are a significant issue for Hobbes, because they tend to be used as a smokescreen to set the priesthood apart from civil authority, and make them an indispensable institution because of their special,

³¹⁰ Ibid., pg. 127.

³¹¹ See also Sommerville’s “*Leviathan and Its Anglican Context*”, especially part 3, where Sommerville reiterates the argument about *De Cive* and brings in the *Elements* as well.

³¹² See Johnson, Paul J. “Hobbes’s Anglican Doctrine of Salvation” for a discussion of a related, but distinct issue, where Hobbes seems to have evolved his opinions in line with current, orthodox Anglican thought. Hobbes, early on in his life, surrounded himself with many of the mainstream religious thinkers of his time, and would have been thoroughly aware of developments and trends in that area.

even magical, powers. Hobbes summarizes the complaint as “the turning of consecration into conjuration or enchantment.” (L44.11/416). This is tantamount to idolatry for Hobbes.

Since the Council of Trent (1545–63) the Roman Catholic Church has officially had seven sacraments: baptism, confession, the Eucharist (also known as Holy Communion or the Lord’s Supper), confirmation, marriage, holy orders, extreme unction (also known as the last rites). Sacraments are vehicles that bestow God’s grace on humankind according to Catholic Doctrine. While they have commemorative and symbolic value, they are chiefly rituals that impart the grace of God. Sacraments are necessary for one’s salvation on this model.³¹³ They can only be administered by an ordained priest. Baptism, for Catholics, involves a removal of the curse imposed by original sin, and is administered to infants as well as adult converts. Those who go unbaptized are denied salvation because they are not officially members of the church. The sacrament of the Eucharist involves transubstantiation, where the ordinary bread and wine is transformed entirely into the flesh and blood of Christ, respectively. Only the bread was shared with the congregation. The Catholic mass was conducted in exclusively in Latin.

The Protestant tradition takes serious issue with the Catholic interpretation. Luther and Calvin both restricted the number of true sacraments to two: namely baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The sacraments were more than mere signs, but they were not the transparent mechanisms of grace that the Catholics contended they were. The “real presence” of Christ was evident at the Lord’s Supper, for instance, but locating it in the

³¹³ See the Catholic Encyclopedia’s entry on the sacraments, accessed at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13295a.htm> [.]

bread and wine or the specific trappings of the ritual was incorrect.³¹⁴ Transubstantiation was seriously misguided.

The Anglican tradition draws on the insights of Luther and Calvin here as well. The 39 Articles of 1571 acknowledge only two true sacraments. Regarding their nature, the 39 Articles says:

Sacraments ordained of Christ, be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession; but rather they be certain sure witnesses and effectual signs of grace towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in him.³¹⁵

Thus, the sacraments have a role in the reception of grace, but it is not as mechanical, as it was understood to be in the Catholic model. Both traditions agree on the symbolic, communitarian, and commemorative value of the sacraments, but this is a secondary function, not their main purpose.

The remaining five, endorsed by the Catholic Church, the Articles call, “states of life allowed in the Scriptures; but yet have not like nature of sacraments with baptism and the Lord’s supper, for that they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained by God.”³¹⁶

The Anglicans saw baptism as a sign of membership in the Church, but also as

a sign of regeneration or new birth, whereby as by an instrument, they that receive baptism are grafted into the Church; the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God, by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed; faith is confirmed; and grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God.³¹⁷

They agreed with the Catholics, however, in preferring infant baptism.

³¹⁴ Franck Lessay offers a nice summary of the viewpoints at work here in his article, “Hobbes’s Protestantism”, especially pgs. 278–279. My own summary here is indebted to his approach.

³¹⁵ 39 Articles, Article 25, Of the Sacraments, in Documents of the English Reformation, pg. 299.

³¹⁶ Ibid., pgs. 299–300.

³¹⁷ Ibid., Article 27, Of Baptism, pg. 301.

The Anglicans saw the Lord's Supper as "not only a sign of the love Christians ought to have among themselves to one another; but rather it is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death."³¹⁸ The English Church vigorously rejected transubstantiation, saying that it "cannot be proved by Holy Writ, but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions."³¹⁹ The English also opposed the display of the sacred host on similar grounds. They believed in sharing the wine with the lay people as well as the bread, but they did require an ordained priest to administer the sacraments.

The Westminster Confession of 1647 largely agree with these views on the sacraments.³²⁰

But Hobbes breaks even further with the tradition, eviscerating the sacraments even further. For him:

A SACRAMENT is a separation of some visible thing from common use, and a consecration of it to God's service, for a sign either of our admission into the kingdom of God (to be of the number of his peculiar people) or for a commemoration of the same. (L35.19/278).

Consecration is separating out an everyday, profane thing and giving it a special dedication to God's use, it is "thereby to change, not the *thing* consecrated, but only the *use* of it from being profane and common to be holy and peculiar to God's service." (L44.11/416, emphasis mine). Hobbes cleanly and clearly breaks with the mainstream of Anglican thought here because he assigns *only* symbolic value to the sacraments, nothing more, nothing to do with grace or the divine presence. "For Hobbes, they are mere signs, whose value is purely symbolic or commemorative. Neither do they carry any effective

³¹⁸ Ibid., Article 28, Of the Lord's Supper, pg. 301.

³¹⁹ Ibid., pgs. 301–302.

³²⁰ See the Westminster Confession, in Documents of the English Reformation, especially pgs. 507–9.

presence nor do they convey any grace.”³²¹ This has the effect of depriving the priesthood of a distinctive ability, one which contributed greatly to their reputation.

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament have distinctive sacraments. For the sacrament of admission the Old Testament has circumcision, the New Testament baptism. For the sacrament of commemoration, the Old Testament has the Passover meal, while the New Testament has the Lord’s Supper.

Hobbes rejects transubstantiation as an abuse of Scriptural language. Christ “never said that, of what bread soever, any priest whatsoever should say *This is my body*, or *this is Christ’s body*, the same should presently be transubstantiated.” (L44.11/417). Hobbes argues even the Catholic Church did not adopt the doctrine until a mere five centuries ago, “when the power of popes was the highest, and the darkness of the time grown so great as men discerned not the bread that was given them to eat” (ibid.).

Hobbes likens the Catholic priest to the Egyptian conjurers of the Old Testament (who turned their staves into serpents in a parody of Moses’ miracle), because “by turning the holy words into the manner of a charm, which produceth nothing new to the sense; but they face us down, that it hath turned the bread into a man—nay more, into a God, and require men to worship it (as if it were our Savior himself present God and man), thereby to commit the most gross idolatry.” (ibid., 416). Both the Egyptians and the priests are liars, and pretend to power over other men.

³²¹ Lessay, “Hobbes’s Protestantism”, pg. 276.

As a result of his views on the sacraments, “Hobbes stood apart from a solid theological group which included Puritans and Arminian Anglicans alike, not to mention other Protestant groups.”³²²

Hobbes seems to have had two principal goals in his account of the sacraments. The first is a metaphysical one. The sacraments as traditionally understood rely on the existence of metaphysical entities which Hobbes will not accept; they must be reconstructed to eliminate these issues. Chief among these is what Hobbes calls the doctrine of “separated essences”, drawn from Aristotle and refined by the Schoolmen. Transubstantiation, consubstantiation, even a “real presence” are difficult notions for Hobbes to integrate into his philosophy.

Secondly, there is the sociopolitical goal of disenfranchising the clergy by exposing the traditional view of the sacraments as a fraud designed to increase clerical prestige and power. On all of the mainstream models of the sacraments, a specially-invested priest is a necessary component. If the grace received through the sacraments is necessary for salvation, then the priestly officiants are necessary. The position is prestigious. If the power to perform the sacraments depends on an exclusive ritual of laying on hands or whatever, then there is a bottleneck. Priests are the only ones who can wield the keys to heaven. People anxious over their salvation will turn to priests for help, perhaps even ignoring their civil sovereigns in order to preserve their souls. This is Hobbes’ worry, and it is no surprise that his account of the value of the sacraments is hollow for this very reason.

³²² Ibid., pg. 280.

Springborg concurs, “The church of Rome committed the double enormity of denying this sovereign prerogative [of Church government], creating a caste of clergy to exercise ecclesiastical functions, and of propagating idolatrous doctrines concerning the nature and attributes of God as a means of bolstering an independent power structure.”³²³

Relics of Gentile Religion

Exorcism is another priestly ritual that Hobbes attacks as fraud. Exorcism has its roots in the belief in the existence of demons, which Hobbes maintains is alien to the Christian tradition, and is rather a “relic of the religion of the Gentiles,” specifically the Greeks.

Exorcism has a remote and a proximate cause. The remote cause is pre-scientific human cognition, where it is “hard for men to conceive of those things in the fancy and in the sense otherwise than of things really without us” (L45.2/436). When anomalies occur, and people see strange things in dreams, hallucinations, etc., humans naturally suppose they saw something *real*, but incorporeal, or something corporeal but “made of air (or other more subtle and ethereal matter)” (Ibid.). Because these people did not understand the mechanism of sense, they supposed that these “objects” (to Hobbes mere phantasms) were what came to be known as *demons*, and these demons were things to be feared for supernatural power. Demons could be good or evil.

The proximate cause of exorcism is merely the specifically Greek account of demonology that influenced the ancient world, even the Jews. The latter saw demons as

³²³ Springborg, “Leviathan and the Problem of Ecclesiastical Authority, pg. 299.

existing only in evil types. “Good demons” were to the Jews, ultimately the spirit of God working through the prophets.

On this account people could become possessed by demons, becoming “demoniacs”. Hobbes is convinced that all accounts of possession are really instances of mental illness. He defines madness as having “stronger and more vehement passions for anything than is ordinarily seen in others” (L8.16/41). Hobbes even believes in collective psychosis, where a multitude under the influence of an “inspired” leader exhibits madness.

Unfortunately, the Bible seems to be guilty of endorsing a belief in both demons and in demonic possession. Does not Christ cast out demons, calling them by name? “I answer that the addressing of our Savior’s command to the madness or lunacy he cureth is no more improper than his rebuking of the fever or of the wind and the sea” (L45.5/438). Christ was speaking metaphorically, which we should give him poetic license. (This is a reason, of course, why Hobbes is wary of the meeting of metaphors and small minds). And no one believes Christ endorsed a belief in fever-spirits or sea-spirits. Furthermore, Christ never spoke of *incorporeal* spirits. Hobbes handles all other such references in a similar way, with a judicious recourse to metaphor.

To the question of why Christ did not enjoin his followers to disbelieve the accounts of malevolent spirits, Hobbes, in good fideist terms, replies “such questions as these are more curious than necessary for a Christian man’s salvation.” (L45.8/440). Christ did not

reveal the truths of natural science either. These were left to men to discover. The lingering of the belief in spirits is no major obstacle to Christ's mission, which was to save mankind.³²⁴

"That there were many demoniacs in the primitive Church, and few madmen and other such singular diseases (whereas in these times we hear and see many madmen, and few demoniacs) proceeds not from the change of nature, but of names." (L45.9/441). A more enlightened world has no more need for demonology.

The same metaphysical and political concerns we saw in Hobbes' treatment of the sacraments is behind the account of exorcism.

Another way to look at these anticlerical issues is to see them through the lens of magic. By "magic" we can mean both (seemingly) supernatural powers and what we would call ordinary stage magic. David Johnston observes, "In Hobbes's eyes, magicians and prophets were the moral enemies of sovereign power and civil peace. The root of their claims to supernatural power was a desire to exercise real power over other men and women."³²⁵ In his analysis, Johnston tends to keep prophecy and miracles on one hand, and magic on the other. It is my sense that Hobbes doesn't always consistently maintain a juxtaposition between these two groups. Rather, Hobbes cites as a main abuse of priests "the turning of consecration into conjuration or enchantment." (L44.11/416). If magic is fraud, and priestly consecration is magic, then priestly rituals are frauds to impress onlookers. If priest bear resemblances to prophets (by working "miracles", like transubstantiation) then we can start to see an implication that prophets might be frauds, too. There is a continuity, at least an occult one, between magic and "miracles". Hobbes has already implied that what is a

³²⁴ Hobbes also makes this argument at L8.25/445.

³²⁵ Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, pg. 153.

miracle to one generation might not be to one more informed. Hobbes, by highlighting the “tricks” seeks to imply, not assert explicitly, that miracles are sleight of hand or chicanery.

Another relic of pagan religion that is preserved by some Christian sects for Hobbes is *idolatry*, the worship of images. Idolatry is prohibited by the second commandment. To worship something is to publicly honor it, with “all words and actions that betoken fear to offend or desire to please” (L45.12/443), whether these signs be sincere or not. A king or other ruler can be safely accorded a level of respect Hobbes calls *civil worship*, as long as the sovereign in question is not thought or treated as if he were more than a human being.

Images are “in the largest sense...either the resemblance or the representation of some thing visible; or both together” (L45.17/445). Since God is not visible, there can be no image of him. Further, since “there can be no image of a thing infinite...there can be no image of God” (L45.15/444). Nothing resembles God and nothing can fully represent him. To worship an image is therefore to worship something other than God; it is to accord honor to something finite and visible.

Interestingly, to both the modern observer and to his contemporaries, Hobbes notes that “if a king compel a man to it [idolatry] by terror of death or other great corporal punishment, it is not idolatry” (L45.22/445).³²⁶ Since the king is the author if his subject’s acts, in this case, the king is the properly sinner on Hobbes’ account.

Closely related to idolatry is *scandalous* worship, “where men whose actions are looked at by others, as lights to guide them by” (L45.26/448) seem to commit idolatry, and lead others astray. A pastor that consents, under threat, to “counterfeit” idolatry, makes sure

³²⁶ Both Bramhall and Hyde positively *howl* at this.

the common people “cannot but stumble and fall in the way of religion” (Ibid.). The pastor sins, although it is only idolatry proper if in his heart he is worshipping the image. A common person commits no sin under compulsion, because his example lacks authority. The pastor is the minister of the sovereign, and possesses some authority merely by his example.

“To worship God in some peculiar place, or turning a man’s face toward an image or determinate place, is not to worship or honor the place or image, but to acknowledge it holy” (L45.23/446). This is in response to some radical puritans who refused to worship in a church, or who argued about priestly raiment or the position of the altar, etc.

Hobbes also adds that “to worship God...in case the place or image be dedicated or set up by private authority (and not by the authority of them that are our sovereign pasts) is idolatry.” (Ibid.) Moses was not wrong to set up the brazen serpent (because he was following God’s orders, and he was both king and high priest), but the Israelites who set up the Golden Calf were.

Hobbes briefly considers two possible counterexamples. The first comes the time of Moses: from the cherubim adorning the Ark of the Covenant and the brazen serpent. First, these images were not worshipped in the strict sense, and secondly, these images were not created by human devising, but were commanded by God. Furthermore, the image of the serpent was destroyed. Hobbes’ second example concerns the painting of angels.

Hobbes has two, wider points he draws from this critique of Christian idolatry. First, “the worship of saints, and images, and relics, and other things at this day practiced in the Church of Rome, I say are not allowed by the Word of God, nor brought into the Church of

Rome from the doctrine there taught, but partly left in it at the first conversion of the Gentiles, and afterwards countenanced, and confirmed, and augmented by the bishops of Rome.” (L45.29/448–9). Furthermore, “Christian sovereigns ought to break down the images which their subjects have been accustomed to worship, that there be no more occasion of such idolatry. For at this day, the ignorant people, where images are worshipped, do really believe there is a divine power in the images” (L45.30.449).

To those who think that no one could be so stupid as to really worship an idol, Hobbes retorts “we see daily, by experience in all sorts of people, that such men as study nothing but their food and ease are content to believe any absurdity rather than to trouble themselves to examine it, holding their faith, as it were, by entail unalienable (except by an express and new law).” (L45.30/450).

The present idolatry of Christian Churches cannot be derived from Scripture, argues Hobbes. It must have happened when the new faith began converting the pagans, who retained some of their old traditions and beliefs. Specifically, Hobbes argues that idolatry crept into the Roman Church when expensive pagan idols were converted to Christian use by new converts who were reluctant to discard their pretty and ostentatious decorations. Moreover, “the immoderate esteem and prices set upon the workmanship” (L45.33/451) of these idols made them valuable tools for priest. Hobbes argues that “as worldly ambition, creeping by degree into the pastors, drew them to an endeavor of pleasing the new made Christians...so the worshipping of the images of Christ and his apostles grew more and more idolatrous” (Ibid.).

There are numerous other relics of paganism at work in the Roman Church. Canonizing saints is an ancient, pagan practice that has no basis in Scripture. It is apotheosis by another name. Furthermore, Hobbes' eschatology has the saints being dead until the resurrection. They could not intercede even if we wanted them to.

Carrying relics and images in procession is a practice from Greek and Roman religion, as are the burning of candles before images, and the use of holy water. Many festivals celebrated by Christians are the palimpsest of pagan revelries.

All of these considerations lead Hobbes to conclude that "the Papacy is no other than the ghost of the deceased Roman empire sitting crowned upon the grave thereof." (L47.21/483).

But Hobbes expresses faith that the contradiction between Scripture and pagan relics will be resolved in the favor of a truly Scriptural Christianity. Commenting on the persistence of these pagan relics, Hobbes writes in words recalling Mark 2:22:³²⁷

And if a man would well observe that which is delivered in the histories concerning the religious rites of the Greeks and Romans, I doubt not but he might find many more of these old bottles of Gentilism, which the doctors of the Roman Church, either by negligence or ambition, have filled up again with the new wine of Christianity, that will not fail in time to break them. (L45.38/453).

Vain Philosophy

In the penultimate chapter of *Leviathan*, Hobbes considers "darkness from vain philosophy and fabulous traditions".³²⁸ Hobbes defines philosophy as the science of the

³²⁷ In the KJV, the passage runs as follows: "And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles."

³²⁸ Curley suggests that Hobbes' title here in all likelihood is a pastiche of two passages from St. Paul. The first is Romans 1: 21–22, "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were

generation and properties of any thing accessible to the human mind. Because it is a science, it excludes experience or mere prudence. It also excludes falsehood. It excludes the argument from authority as well, as this is merely uncritical faith in that author, not science. Finally, philosophy cannot deal with knowledge acquired from revelation, “because it is not acquired by reasoning.” (L46.4/454).

Hobbes has a low opinion of Ancient philosophy: He asserts, “The natural philosophy of those schools was rather a dream than science, and set forth in senseless and insignificant language” (L46.11/456).³²⁹ Adding, “Their *logic*, which should be the method of reasoning, is nothing else but captions [quibbles] of words, and inventions how to puzzle such as should go about to pose them.” (L46.11/457). Finally, “Their moral philosophy is but a description of their own passions.” (L46.11/456). And “in so great diversity of taste, there is nothing generally agreed on, but every one doth (as far as he dares) whatsoever seemeth good in his own eyes, to the subversion of commonwealth.” (Ibid. /457).

In sum,

there is nothing so absurd that the old philosophers (as Cicero saith, who was one of them) have not some of them maintained. And I believe that scarce anything can be more absurdly said in natural philosophy than that which now is called *Aristotle's Metaphysics*; nor more repugnant to government than much of that he hath said in his *Politics*; nor more ignorantly than a great part of his *Ethics*.” (L46.11/457).

Hobbes does not seriously engage with the texts of Ancient philosophy. He dismisses them with great rhetorical flourish. But the philosophers of antiquity are not really

thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” and Colossians 2:8, “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” Both renditions are from the KJV. See also n12 on 463 of Curley’s edition.

³²⁹ Recall how Hobbes traces the belief in incorporeal substances back to mistaken dreams, among other things.

his targets here, it is the contemporary use of these ideas he finds troubling. And to this end, all the ridicule he can heap on the Ancients is worth it.

Hobbes notes that, in the early Church's converts, "Among them were also philosophers; but the latter embraced the faith as half-baked Christians; unwilling to desert the teachings of their masters, they retained as many of those teachings as they could in any way reconcile with Christian doctrine." (L46.9/470[OL]). So it was not just religious ideas like demonology that persisted in this atavism, but philosophical notions as well. The blending of Greek philosophy and Christian doctrine seemed invisible at the time. It would be centuries before philosophy had enough perspective to see the two distinct ideas which were ultimately incompatible (in Hobbes' eyes) with each other.

Hobbes is no kinder to Jewish thought, "by their lectures and disputations in their synagogues they turned the doctrine of their law into a fantastical kind of philosophy concerning the incomprehensible nature of God and spirits, which they compounded of the vain philosophy of the Grecians, mingled with their own fancies, drawn from the obscurer places of the Scripture (and which might most easily be wrested to their purpose) and from the fabulous traditions of their ancestors." (L46.12/457).

Hobbes seeks to overturn the educational orthodoxy of his time, where "tenets of vain philosophy, derived to the Universities and then to the Church" (L46.13/458). Regarding University education, Hobbes writes "since the authority of Aristotle is only

current there, that study is not properly philosophy (the nature whereof dependeth not on authors) but Aristotelity.” (L46.13/458).³³⁰

Hobbes lambastes the metaphysics and the physics of the School Men, in ways that should be familiar to us. Hobbes critique aims to make it be “that men may no longer suffer themselves to be abused by them that by this doctrine of *separated essences*, built on the vain philosophy of Aristotle, would fright them from obeying the laws of their country with empty names, as men fright birds from the corn with an empty doublet, a hat, and a crooked stick.” (L46.18/460). The doctrine confuses people, with “insignificant trains of strange and barbarous words...yet it hath a quality, not only to hide the truth, but also to make men think they have it, and desist from further search.” (L46.40/467). It makes subject believe in magic powers wielded by priests (and not by civil sovereigns).

Hobbes is no gentler to the ethics and political theory derived from ancient republicans. But he devotes special attention to the question of priestly marriage. “It is also vain and false philosophy to say the work of marriage is repugnant to chastity or continence, as they do that pretend chastity and continence for the ground of denying marriage to the clergy.” (L46.33/464). If sex is too unclean for priests, “much more should other natural, necessary, and daily works, which all men do, render men unworthy to be priests, because they are more unclean.” (Ibid.). But the real reason is not purity at all. Hobbes suggests that St. Paul’s emphasis on the unmarried life made early preachers better able to escape persecution than “to be clogged with the care of wife and children” (L46.34/465)! But the

³³⁰Remarkably, Hobbes says of Aristotle “it may be he knew [it] to be false philosophy, but writ it as a thing consonant to, and corroborative of, their [Athenian] religion—and fearing the fate of Socrates” (L.46.18/460).

“secret foundation” (L46.34/465) is papal ambition. Celibacy “serveth to assure this power of the Pope over kings” (L47.10/479), because if a king is priest he cannot control his succession and he is beholden to the orders of the Pope.³³¹

Hobbes’ crescendo is an indictment of flawed accounts of supernatural events:

for all the errors brought in from false or uncertain history, what is all the legend of *fictional* miracles in the lives of the saints, and all the histories of apparitions and ghosts alleged by the doctors of the Roman Church (to make good their doctrines of hell and purgatory, the power of exorcism, and other doctrines which have no warrant, neither in reason, nor Scripture), as also all those traditions which they call the unwritten word of God, but old wives’ fables? (L46.41/467, emphasis mine).

The early fathers were either gullible or fraudulent to put so much stock in these stories. Hobbes can be read on many levels in this critique. First, we can see a strictly anti-Catholic screed. Then, perhaps a criticism of human frailty when it comes to these tales. Finally, we can see Hobbes casting radical doubt on the reliability of *any* accounts of the supernatural, a familiar theme in his work, but one he takes some measure to conceal.

The Schoolmen are guilty of many gross intellectual errors in Hobbes’ mind. They are committed to arguments from (suspicious) authority. They mix their corrupted philosophy with religion. They extended their ideas beyond experience to the dream world, and built up the whole edifice from a shaky foundation of vague definitions.

But they were the predominant line of thought in Hobbes’ era. Scholasticism was clearly the intellectual arm of the Roman Catholic Church. But it was also a major component of the education of Oxford and Cambridge. Thus, it had important influences on the Anglican intellectual tradition as well. Reading the dispute between Hobbes and

³³¹ Hobbes also notes that Scripture since says that in the kingdom of God the blessed will not marry, so that if the present Church is the kingdom of God, as the Roman Church maintains, its “blessed” (i.e., priests) cannot marry.

Bramhall is enough to see both Bramhall's deep intellectual debt to Scholasticism on the one hand and Hobbes' deep, early Modern contempt for it. What better than to replace the honorable position of Aristotle than a *Leviathan*?

Cui bono?

Thus, the central point of Hobbes' account of the Kingdom of Darkness is to show that all of the "darkness" (non-Christian elements) in contemporary Christianity wasn't just forgivable error, it was ideological. Every departure from true Christianity served some interest. Hobbes introduces his conclusion with a rare approving mention Cicero, who recounts a story of a judge who asked plaintiffs "cui bono?", that is, "who benefits?" from having committed an alleged crime. "For amongst presumptions there is no that so evidently declareth the author as doth the benefit of an action." (L47.1/477).

Hobbes recapitulates the several doctrines of darkness that he has identified in Part IV. The cornerstone of these is the doctrine that the Kingdom of God is the present Church, but Hobbes ticks off several more. He cites the doctrine of papal infallibility, the subordination of bishops to the pope, the exemption of clergy from civil laws. He highlights the special place accorded to the Lord's Supper, and to the priests who administer it. Hobbes notes that by making of matrimony a sacrament, the priesthood can designate some marriages as legitimate and others not. Priestly celibacy prevents a sovereign from being both king and priest. Confession serves to provide "intelligence of the design of princes" (L47.11/479)! By canonizing saints, priests encourage the belief that they can determine who is saved. Their alleged sacramental powers do the same. Purgatory, with its attendant notion of indulgences, "enriches" the clergy. The belief in demons, possession, and exorcism makes

“the people more in awe of their power.” (L47.15/480). Finally, the doctrines of Aristotle, as used in the Schools with their “frivolous distinctions, barbarous terms, and obscure language...serve them to keep these errors from being detected. And to make men mistake the *ignis fatuus* [will o’ wisp] of vain philosophy for the light of the Gospel.” (L47.16/480).

After this exhaustive list, Hobbes is forced to conclude that if we examine these doctrines together, we can see

the profit whereof redoundeth manifestly to the setting up of an unlawful power over the lawful sovereigns of the Christian people, or for the sustaining of the same when it is set up, or to the worldly riches, honor, and authority of those that sustain it. And therefore, by the aforesaid rule of *cui bono* we may justly pronounce for the authors of all this spiritual darkness the Pope, and Roman clergy, *and all those besides* that endeavor to settle in the minds of men this erroneous doctrine: that the Church now on earth is that kingdom of God mentioned in the Old and New Testament. (L47.17/480, emphasis mine)

Elsewhere Hobbes says “The authors, therefore, of this darkness in religion are the Roman *and* the presbyterian clergy.” (L47.4/478, emphasis mine). This association makes sense if we recall that Hobbes thought Beza’s assertion that the kingdom of God is of this present world was “The most difficult place to answer” (L44.17/421).³³²

Hobbes thus seems to share the sentiments of John Milton who famously wrote that, “New presbyter is but old priest writ large”.³³³ It’s fair to say Hobbes opposed both Roman Catholics and Presbyterians. But I think it goes deeper than that. Any ecclesiology that asserts (a) a special role or powers for the priesthood and (b) asserts the independence of the spiritual from the temporal, is guilty of essentially the same offense. And this means that we

³³² Beza was Calvin’s successor in Geneva. The Genevan church followed the presbyterian model of organization. If the Scottish and Parliamentary rebels followed Beza’s example, then the Presbyterian model writ large claimed the same thing about the kingdom of God. Hobbes had plenty of grounds to dislike the Presbyterians to begin with, this just added another.

³³³ This is the concluding line from “On the new forcers of conscience under the long parliament” (1647). Sommerville brings this up in “Hobbes, Selden, Erastianism, and the history of the Jews”, pg. 162.

can also see a hidden critique of traditional Anglican mores, Canterbury sandwiched in between Geneva and Rome. [bring in the sec lit that mentions this!]

Hobbes accuses priests, of all stripes, of abusing their position for seditious and ambitious fraud, of willfully distorting Biblical doctrines to further their ends, of setting themselves apart from both ordinary men and ordinary subjection.

Later in *Leviathan*, Hobbes takes a less serious approach to the rejection of papal power, comparing it to the kingdom of the fairies! Consider the comparisons:

1. The Roman Church is the ghost of the Roman Empire.
2. The secret language of the fairies is unknown, but the Church uses Latin.
3. The universal king of the fairies is Oberon; for Catholics it is the Pope.
4. “The ecclesiastics are spiritual men and ghostly fathers. The fairies are spirits and ghosts.” (L47.24/483).
5. Fairies live in “enchanted castles”, Catholics “have their cathedral churches” (L47.25/483).
6. Fairies vanish into thin air to evade authorities; ecclesiastical courts accomplish the same.
7. Fairies kidnap human children, so, too, “The ecclesiastics take from young men the use of their reason by certain charms compounded of metaphysics, and miracles, and traditions, and abused Scripture” (L47.27/483).
8. Universities are the fairy laboratories of the church, where they create their enchantments.

9. Fairies send elves to pinch those they are displeased with; the Pope sends his agents to annoy princes.
10. “The fairies marry not, but there be amongst them incubi that have copulation with flesh and blood. The priests also marry not.” (L47.29/483).³³⁴
11. Priests support themselves by tithes; fairies “enter into dairies and feast upon the cream they skim from the milk.” (L47.31/484).
12. Priests repay donations with fairytale currency – “canonizations, indulgencies, and masses” (L47.32.484).
13. Fairies have “no existence but in the fancies of ignorant people, rising from the traditions of old wives or old poets”, so papal power “consisteth only in the fear that seduced people stand in of their excommunications, upon hearing of false miracles, false traditions, and false interpretations of the Scripture.” (L47.33/484).
14. Both fairies and the Roman church are pesky, and hard to get rid of.

This is, of course, outrageous. But it is carefully calculated theater. First, note that Hobbes does not refer to the papacy consistently throughout his lampoon. In fact, most of these comments are sect-neutral. Even when the Papacy is the explicit focus, we should always be aware that “it is not the Roman clergy only that pretends the kingdom of God to be of this world, and thereby to have a power therein distinct from that of the civil state.”

³³⁴ Quentin Skinner notes that this passage epitomizes the rhetorical device of *aposiopesis*, where a clear implication is set up, but not made explicit. If these sentences were completely parallel, Hobbes is saying priest violate their vow of celibacy, perhaps in a predatory and/or corrupting way. Or he could be implying that priests “seduce” minds as well. See *Reason and Rhetoric*, pg. 419.

(L47.34/484).³³⁵ The overall effect is to make priests harder to be taken seriously. Its position as Hobbes' parting salvo should not be underestimated.

The Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity is central for main stream Christian thought. Throughout the history of Christianity, however, there have been those who have denied the validity of the concept. In Hobbes' own time, those who denied the Trinity were often referred to as "Socinians", after Fausto Sozzini (Latin : Socinius), an Italian aristocrat who moved to Poland in 1580 and lead a sect of radical Christians, who among other things, were known for their Anti-Trinitarian leanings.³³⁶

Hobbes was accused of Socinianism in his work. Tuck observes that Hobbes "cast doubt on the Trinity, both by denying the possibility of a Holy Ghost or Spirit, and by asserting that Christ was the same person as God only in the sense in which Moses was also".³³⁷ His account of the Trinity as successive impersonation had the effect of explaining a "mystery" and thereby disenchanting it.

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes argues "it is plain that Moses...was alone he that represented to the Israelites the person of God" (L.40.7/319). Later he claims, that "Our Savior, therefore, both in teaching an reigning, representeth (*as Moses did*) the person of God" (L.41.9/333, *emphasis mine*). On the one hand, these claims seem to create an equivalency between Christ and Moses, potentially making the former just a man. On the other hand, they seem to cast

³³⁵ The OL (47.27/487) renders this passage "For it is not only the Romans who aspire to government by the church, on a claim of divine right [*jure divino*]." While Hobbes tones down some of the humor in the OL, as Skinner points out repeatedly in *Reason and Rhetoric*, he retains all 14 comparisons.

³³⁶ See Chadwick, Owen, *The Reformation*, pgs. 200–3.

³³⁷ Tuck, Richard "Hobbes and Locke on Toleration", pg. 165.

doubt on the fundamentally tripartite substance of God. Moses and Christ are both portrayed as representative of *one* God, “The Father”. This kind of talk went straight to the core of belief for many believers in Hobbes’ time.

The charges stuck with Hobbes long enough for him to mention these issues in the Latin *Leviathan*’s appendices. In Appendix 1, regarding the Nicene Creed, he first reconsiders the issues surrounding the Trinity. While ostensibly acting as a good faith interpreter, Hobbes seems to undermine the validity of the concepts involved.

For instance, “A.” makes an interesting aside, arguing:

It seems to me that they [early Christian doctors] were not right to want to explain that mystery. For what do you do when you explain a mystery except destroy it, or make of a mystery what is not a mystery? For faith, converted to knowledge, perishes, leaving only hope and charity. (L.App1.15/502).

The fact that this is precisely what Hobbes himself has done with the Trinity, should not be lost on us.

Later on, Hobbes also argues that

...almost all those theologians who published explanations of the Nicene creed use definitions taken from the logic and metaphysics of Aristotle, when they ought to have proven the holy Trinity from Sacred Scripture alone. I am amazed also that the Nicene Fathers, so many of whom were philosophers, did not bring into the creed itself those terms of art which they used in their explanations. (L.App1.90/518).

Curley points out that this is a patently false statement by Hobbes, made by “A.” and uncontested by “B.”. There *are* philosophical terms (*homoousios* and *ousia*) in the creed, and there is no Scriptural basis for them. By making such a statement, Hobbes is undermining

our confidence in the Scriptural basis of the creed, and casting doubt on the Trinity itself.³³⁸ The implication is that the doctrine of the Trinity is another relic of Gentile philosophy.

In Appendix 3, as well, he discusses the Trinity. Here he comes closest to a retraction of his earlier approach. Hobbes “admits” that “For since Moses also bore the person of God in some manner (as all Christian kings do), he seems to make Moses one person of the Trinity.” (L.App3.12/543). He further confesses to being “careless” in this regard, but in spite the fact that :he repeats the same thing in many places...it can easily be corrected” (L.App3.12–14/543). When properly reformulated, Moses is merely a lieutenant.³³⁹ Lessay notes that this concession doesn’t accomplish much: “Although the former persons of the Trinity now became ministers of God, the triune nature of the divinity was still understood in terms of historical representation, and from that viewpoint, Jesus played a role undistinguishable from Moses and the apostles”.³⁴⁰

I am left with the sense that Hobbes rejected any mystical interpretation of the Trinity, and that he thought at best that it was a useful device to illustrate his theory of personhood. Contaminated as it was by Greek philosophical notions, Hobbes found little to save in it but its name.

³³⁸ See Curley, Edwin, “Reply to Professor Martinich”, pg. 286–7. Again, the arguments holds whether you want to follow Curley into advocating Hobbes’ atheism, or if you more moderately wish to see him as “merely” a Socinian.

³³⁹ Hobbes certainly felt the need to retreat from his bold challenge to the Trinity. Whether he genuinely felt like he had committed an easily-corrected error, or if he was just being disingenuous, there is plenty of room for debate in the literature. Myself, I lean toward Hobbes being skeptical of the Trinity.

³⁴⁰ Lessay, “Hobbes’s Protestantism”, 285. Lessay cites a passage from Bramhall which draws out the implication that the Trinity, being thrust into history, lacks eternity. There was a time when it did not exist, and perhaps where it could not exist (or be changed), Ibid., n.79.

Independency?

A number of recent scholars have tried to argue that Hobbes was actually an Independent in matters of religion. While a provocative thesis, I do not think this line of reasoning is correct.

In his introduction to Hobbes' life and ideas,³⁴¹ Richard Tuck argues that Hobbes was sympathetic to the Independents.³⁴² One of the bases of this interpretation is a curious passage towards the end of *Leviathan*. After praising England for untying the successive “knots” of papal control, episcopacy, and finally the Presbyterians, Hobbes claims that “we are reduced to the independency of the primitive Christians, to follow Paul, or Cephas, or Apollos, every man as he liketh best. Which, if it be without contention...is perhaps the best.” (L47.20/482)³⁴³

Tuck makes his case by arguing that Hobbes had principled reasons to endorse Independency, and further that his personal actions put him on the side of the Independents as well. Jeffrey Collins has made similar arguments.³⁴⁴ Hobbes shared many of the arguments used by the Independents against both episcopacy and Presbyterianism. On a more personal

³⁴¹ Tuck, *Hobbes: A Very Short Introduction*. The argument occurs on pages 34–48, in a section entitled “The life of a heretic”.

³⁴² By the Independents, we mean any of the various radical Christian sects that argued for totally dismantling the state's monopoly on religion. The Independents, whom history came to call “puritans” wanted to leave the disposition of each congregation solely to the members of the congregation alone. Sommerville summarizes this as follows: “Independents argued that churches should be voluntary associations, or congregations, of godly people. The local congregation of the faithful, they held, should be autonomous in church affairs. On civil and political questions, indeed, congregations would be subject to the state authorities, but they would not be subordinate in ecclesiastical affairs to any national or regional hierarchy of churchmen, nor to any synods, assemblies or councils. In church affairs each congregation would be independent – hence Independency.” (Johann Sommerville, “Hobbes and Independency”, *Revista di storia della filosofia*, n. 1, 2004, 156–173. Page 157.) It is worth noting that Cromwell and much of the New Model Army were Independents, so the association of Independency with the Protectorate was clear to most of Hobbes' contemporaries.

³⁴³ Curley observes that Clarendon found this statement to be an endorsement of the Independents.

³⁴⁴ CITE! *The allegiance of Thomas Hobbes*, among others.

level, Hobbes is said to have given “aid and advice” to Independents making arguments against traditional Church organization.³⁴⁵ Hobbes befriended the Independent-minded John Selden. Tuck claims that Hobbes wrote *Leviathan* as a sort of application for readmission to England, and that the passages in the Review and Conclusion, which speak to submitting to a conqueror are intended to endorse the Cromwell regime. Tuck claims that in his later writings, “Cromwell is treated with considerable respect”.³⁴⁶

Johann Sommerville has vigorously disputed Tuck’s claims in his article “Hobbes and Independency”. As we have seen, Hobbes had little love for the Anglican clergy in exile, resenting them for their apparent role in alienating him from the young king, among other things.³⁴⁷

Hobbes did agree with the Independents on some key points of principle, but not many. He agreed that there was no biblically mandated Church organization, and the Church had no power apart from the state. But he rejected the nonconformity of the Independents to a single standard of uniform religious observance. He rejected their willingness to refuse to acquiesce to state authority when guided by their conscience, up to and including outright rebellion. He also lacks their confidence in the transparency of the Scriptural message, and the right of the individual to embrace his or her own interpretation of it. Clearly, Hobbes is against all such forms of enthusiasm and inspiration. Hobbes argues, in a word, that the Independents were “lawless, greedy, rebellious madmen.”³⁴⁸

³⁴⁵ Tuck, *Hobbes*, 41.

³⁴⁶ Tuck, *Hobbes*, 44.

³⁴⁷ See Chapter 2.

³⁴⁸ Sommerville, “Hobbes and Independency”, 170.

Sommerville also argues that Tuck overstates or outright distorts Hobbes' personal relationships with individual Independent thinkers. Hobbes certainly did not speak glowingly of Cromwell, as Tuck contends. Tuck's argument for the personal connection depends heavily on his reading of a series of letters to Hobbes from one Henry Stubbe, an Oxford academic, whom Tuck alleges to be an Independent. Sommerville argues that Stubbe was more opportunist than Independent, wanting to use Hobbes to gain access to his patron.

We can find more evidence of this difference between Hobbes and Independent thought. In his 1679 [?] defense of his reputation against the attacks of John Wallis, the Oxford mathematician, Hobbes writes that "it is his private opinion, that such an episcopacy as is now in England, is the most commodious that a Christian King can use for the governing of Christ's flock".³⁴⁹ We can certainly dispute the sincerity of this claim. He also claims that he "wrote and published his *Leviathan*, far from the intention either of disadvantage to his Majesty, or to flatter Oliver, who was not made Protector till three or four years after, on purpose to make way for his return."³⁵⁰ This claim about Cromwell does indeed fit with the facts of *Leviathan's* publication, although it is by no means clear that the arguments of that work have the royalist intent Hobbes claims for them here.

We can also recall Hobbes' assertion from his discussion of natural religion that "seeing a commonwealth is but one person, it ought to exhibit to God but one worship...where many sorts of worship ne allowed, proceeding from the different religions

³⁴⁹ Hobbes, "Considerations on the reputation of T. Hobbes", in EW, IV, 432.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 415.

of private men, it cannot be said that there is any public worship, nor that the commonwealth is of any religion at all.” (L31.37/242)³⁵¹

So what are we to make of the passage in Chapter 47 of *Leviathan*, which seemingly endorses Independency? One argument is recourse to irony, which is the interpretation of Martinich, according to Sommerville.

The problem is that these matters of religion cannot be “without contention” under the terms dominant in Hobbes’ time, an argument Lloyd thinks reasonable [more]. Hobbes’ idyllic, democratic picture of the early Church resonates with our modern experience to a degree that we would mistake it for an endorsement. But much as with Plato, Hobbes was deeply suspicious of democracy. Hobbes could not (or would not) imagine a world without monolithic, national churches.

How do the two pieces fit together?

Hobbes repeats many of the same arguments between Parts III and IV of *Leviathan*, sometimes offering two separate arguments in each Part, sometimes deepening or completing the argument begun in Part III in Part IV. This complicated relationship prompts the reader to wonder, “why are there two Parts here, and what is the relation between them?”

SA Lloyd offers the following helpful opinion on the relative roles of Parts III and IV, “Part 3 redescribes competing or problematic characterizations of the disruptive interest, using acceptable methods for interpreting the nonnatural source of knowledge taken to be

³⁵¹ The marginal note reads, “Public Worship consisteth in Uniformity”.

authoritative in such questions. Part 4 then completes the argument by providing a sociological and historical account of how the errors that underwrote the disruptive characterization of interest in Part 3 arose, attempting thereby, to delegitimize, once and for all, the problematic conception of interest.”³⁵² Obviously, we need to unpack Lloyd’s rather clinical and technical language here to grasp her meaning.

Lloyd is saying that Hobbes presents an alternative view of the entire Christian drama. He retains all of the important elements (Trinity, heaven and hell, miracles, etc.) but he redescribes them using a new form of biblical analysis and bringing new scientific tools to the conversation. He does not jettison too much, in order to keep his reader’s attention (and to save his own hide, we might add). He sticks to the text of the Bible, or at least claims he does. In Part III, Hobbes merely rationally reconstructs Christianity, presenting a new picture of what that religion could and should look like. He sees it as both intellectually airtight and politically expedient. Lloyd thinks that most of this attempt was sincere on Hobbes’ part, that he was in pursuit of a genuine reconciliation between Christianity and the new scientific disciplines (both physics and civil science). Martinich ascribes to Hobbes the same project. I have my doubts, but the external form of Hobbes’ project, I believe, follows the pattern Lloyd lays out.

Part IV, according to Lloyd, is where Hobbes shows us how 17th century orthodox views of Christianity arose, and seeks to expose the ideological foundations of that view for what they are – a land grab by priests. Hobbes himself says “in the fourth part, lest the people be seduced by false doctors, I have exposed the ambitious and cunning plans of the

³⁵² Lloyd, *Ideals as Interests in Leviathan*, pp. 311–312.

adversaries of the Anglican Church.” (L47.29/488 [OL]). If my interpretation is correct, this last line contains a slight bit of irony, because Hobbes is referring to the reconstructed Anglican Church he envisions, and not the actually-existing Anglican Church. Hobbes’ analysis seems to attack the later as much as some of his more explicit opponents.

Lloyd’s analysis is important because it tells us something Hobbes never did: how to read his masterpiece chapter-by-chapter, so that the sometimes disjointed-seeming pieces fit together.

Putting it all together

So this is Hobbes’ vision of Christianity: a field of national churches, headed by each nation’s sovereign. These churches are organized as the sovereign sees fit, with the proviso that the sovereign exercises total control over them, and may even choose to perform pastoral function if he desires. All church ministers owe their appointment to the sovereign, and administer to religious functions in his name. The sovereign alone reigns *jure divino*. All appointments may be modified or revoked at any time. The sovereign may delegate some authority to church ministers, even the Pope in Rome, but these have no independent authority at all. The sovereign may receive advice, but not *commands* from church leaders. Control over church organization is an inalienable right of sovereignty. There is no meaningful distinction between temporal and spiritual power. A sovereign must be wary of the tendencies in human nature to exploit the role of the priest to subvert legitimate state power.

The sovereign also has an inalienable right to set religious doctrine. This includes determining the meaning of Holy Scripture, even including what books of the Bible are to

count as canonical. The sovereign also determines what counts as a miracle and who is to be considered a prophet.

There are only two sacraments, Baptism, an act of initiation into the church, and the Lord's Supper, a commemoration of Christ's sacrifice. Both have symbolic value only: no special presence or transference of grace occurs during the sacrament. Only permission from the sovereign is required to perform the sacraments.

Despite the latitude accorded to the sovereign in doctrinal matters, it is important for the subjects to recognize that only a handful of doctrines are essential for salvation. Reservations can and must be kept to oneself. God can see into our hearts, and he alone can judge our inner thoughts and beliefs. Even seemingly idolatrous practices must be acquiesced to, because martyrdom is not the duty of every Christian it is the exclusive province of those called directly by God. Christ commanded his followers to believe in him *and* to obey those in power. One cannot be saved without fulfilling both of these criteria. It is certainly not a sin to go against one's conscience in religious matters, if it means obeying the sovereign.

A scientifically-minded Christian can expect an afterlife much different than traditional views, and one consistent with materialism. It will be on earth, in a kingdom personally ruled over by Christ. Saints will live forever with new, more perfect bodies. Sinners will mercifully die a second death. Hell and everlasting torment will be seen for what they are: metaphors.

An enlightened Christian will also see that the philosophy of Aristotle and his successors, the School Divines, will offer no help in religious issues. In fact, quite the

contrary. Natural reason has little to say about Christianity, and it is vanity to search among the Greek philosophers for answers to properly Christian mysteries.

Christianity has been purged of all alien (that is, non-Scriptural) elements by Hobbes' redescription and analysis. It is no longer tainted by Roman models of empire; Greek notions of the soul, spirit, and demons; or Aristotelian-inspired Scholastic obfuscation.

Hobbes' account has two components, first an assertion of sovereign supremacy in matters of religion, and second, advice on doctrines from a would-be counselor and expert. The latter is explicitly made conditional on sovereign approval, but it acknowledges that it was written in the absence of a proper authority. These two pieces need not be taken together, although it is easier to imagine the first without the second, rather than vice versa.

So we can pose Cassii's question to Hobbes himself: *cui bono*? The answer is unabashedly, "the sovereign!" But on Hobbes' model, the sovereign is a rational device for the survival of the subject. So the answer, for Hobbes, is more fully, the *commonwealth* as a whole benefits. But if we take a step back and address the war of ideologies here, Hobbes is clearly endorsing a unified sovereign power over the divisive power of a so-called spiritual kingdom. I do not think that this is an accident or an oversight. Hobbes practically invites the careful reader to turn the device onto his own analysis. What emerges with relative clarity is an instance of "politick religion" in the Machiavellian vein. We now turn to these matters.

Chapter 6: *Leviathan's* Insincerity

Hobbes was not an orthodox Christian. He was not a sincere Christian either. His purpose in writing *Leviathan* was to rationalize and domesticate Christianity for the purposes of stable rule. Hobbes instrumentalizes religion in a cynical way similar to Machiavelli, although he is not as straightforward about it. Underneath it all, Hobbes personally seems to have been closer to a deist than anything else, although he appears to have had some misgivings about his beliefs. We may never be able to determine exactly what Hobbes himself thought, but the message of *Leviathan* is not perfectly literal and contains deep skeptical questions about Christianity. It also contains a somewhat cynical use of religion as a tool for social engineering. In writing this way, Hobbes was involving himself in a long tradition of skepticism and “politick religion”, and his contemporary critics saw him as doing such.

“Atheism”: Past and Present

Typically, those who assert Hobbes’ atheism do so partly by indicating that so many of his contemporaries saw him as an atheist, and thus he must be an atheist. One of the stumbling blocks here is that to call someone an “atheist” in 17th-Century England meant that you were using an ambiguous term. “Atheism” was often used simply as a term of abuse, with no real implications as to its theological ramifications. It often expressed simple dislike or political disagreement. It was not uncommon, for instance, for the Jesuits to be called atheists in Stuart England (and *vice versa*)! But there were more specific uses as well.

For the early moderns, writes David Wootton, “The quintessence of atheism was believed to be a combination of Epicureanism and Machiavellism: the pursuit of pleasure and power without fear of divine retribution.”³⁵³ Atheists were commonly believed to deny the existence of heaven and hell, to deny the intervention of God in the natural world, and to deny the immortality of the soul. There was a strong connotation of immorality associated with “practical atheism”.³⁵⁴

Unbelief was something to be kept hidden, “it is easy to find examples of individuals who rejected completely the truth of the Christian religion, but who yet maintained that it was essential that religion should be inculcated in the common people, on the grounds that only a small minority of philosophers were capable of acting well out of virtue rather than the fear of God.”³⁵⁵ But this did not stop the opinion from being prevalent among that small minority. “At times – in the France of Mazarin or the England of the later Stuarts – unbelief appears to have been fashionable and widely disseminated amongst the educated ruling class.”³⁵⁶

These unbelievers thought that “only religion could provide an adequate foundation for social order.” and understood “the social utility of the fear of God”³⁵⁷ Hence, “atheists in

³⁵³ Wootton, David, “Unbelief in Early Modern Europe”, *History Workshop* 20 (1985: Autumn), 82–100, pg. 86. As we can see, Hobbes appears guilty of both “vices”. Oakeshott argues that “The biographical evidence for connecting Hobbes with the neo-Epicurean movement is conclusive” (*Hobbes on Civil Association*, pg. 154 [the specific reference is to a review of Strauss]).

³⁵⁴ Ibid., pg. 86

³⁵⁵ Ibid., pg. 87.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., pg. 92.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., pg. 87.

general were convinced of the social necessity of faith, and consequently of their own moral obligation to conceal their unbelief under a cloak of hypocrisy and deceit.”³⁵⁸

The term “atheist” seems to have gained currency after the start of the Reformation, and reflected the worry that lack of religious cohesion could lead to social disorder.³⁵⁹ “It was a commonplace of anti-atheist writings that unbelief was encouraged by religious schism.”³⁶⁰ There was tremendous worry at the time about the spread of atheism; it was an epidemic similar to the Red Scare. This, “Anxiety focused on two areas...One was a kind of secular attitude to politics habitually associated with Machiavelli...In addition, naturalism and systems of scientific explanation [were] seen as implicitly atheist caused misgivings”³⁶¹

Wootton’s discussion provides at least circumstantial evidence to consider when analyzing the work of Thomas Hobbes for signs of atheism. If we connect many of these dots, we will find an image Hobbes looking back at us.

Michael Hunter observes that there were five criteria for atheism that recurred in English polemics against irreligion at the time. The first was “questioning of the authority of the scriptures and drawing attention to inconsistencies within them”; second the denial of providence and a “preference for natural as against supernatural explanations”; third, denial of the soul’s immortality, because “this was thought to lead to a dismissal of the Last Judgment as ‘ridiculous and fabulous’” while glorifying worldly ambition; fourth, a “cynical”,

³⁵⁸ Ibid., pg. 88.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., pg. 90.

³⁶⁰ Hunter, Michael, “The Problem of ‘Atheism’ in Early Modern England”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Fifth Series*, Vol. 35 (1985), 135-157, pg. 154.

³⁶¹ Hunter, pg. 155.

Machiavellian vision of religion as a human invention and social tool; finally, atheists were thought, consequent to their beliefs, to be “scoffers”.³⁶²

Hunter admits this is more a paranoiac vision of the atheist than any document of an actual atheist culture of the time. There was, however, at least some truth to these ideas. But even if this was only the popular impression, than it is hard not to see how Hobbes’ contemporaries could view him as a thoroughgoing atheist. It is a veritable portrait of the “Beast of Malmsbury”! In fact, if we consider the rhetorical argument below, Hobbes may have intentionally styled himself after the caricature to achieve an effect.

The modern reader, however, has a fairly clear, unified, and *different* idea of what it means to be an atheist. An atheist usually denies the truth of the monotheistic “belief in a personal God who takes an interest in the world and who has given a special revelation to humans.”³⁶³ Many modern atheists deny the existence of any sort of god or gods, personal or not, or any supernatural existence or events whatsoever.³⁶⁴

Not many 17th-Century thinkers could truly be called an atheist in this latter modern sense, although many could fall into the former camp. Hobbes certainly admits, probably sincerely, that the idea of God as first cause is acceptable to him, although this is far from a robust picture of the personal God of Christianity. He says, “it is impossible to make any profound inquiry into natural causes without being inclined thereby to believe there is one God eternal, though they cannot have any idea of him in their mind answerable to his

³⁶² Hunter, Michael, “The Problem of ‘Atheism’ in Early Modern England”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Fifth Series*, Vol. 35 (1985), pp. 135-157, pgs.141–2.

³⁶³ Martin, Michael, “General Introduction” to *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, ed. Michael Martin. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 1–7. pgs. 1–2.

³⁶⁴ See *ibid.*, pg. 2. Many modern atheists are also strict materialists, like Hobbes, so there is a natural tendency to put him into their camp.

nature.” (L11.25/62). He certainly does his best to disenchant the world and leave it with only natural laws.

It is undeniable that Hobbes was called an atheist countless times by his critics, and that the full range of meanings was intended, including the modern ones. Given the various definitions and nuances mentioned, this amounts to a large number, of often incompatible, accusations.

The controversy of interpretations

If you ask a scholar whether Hobbes believed in God, the most common answer is a resounding “no!” followed often by an “of course not!”.³⁶⁵ The same is also true, by and large, of his contemporary critics and for much of the 18th and 19th Century. But recently, there are a large number of historically-minded scholars who have argued the contrary, saying that it is “obvious” or nearly so if he is properly contextualized that Hobbes was not an atheist. We can speak generally and say that for every statement, pro or con, about Hobbes’ sincerity on matters of religion, there is a vociferous adherent to both sides of the argument, typically invoking the obviousness of their claim. This dissensus is, of course, a lousy place to start.

³⁶⁵ In fact, Willis Glover calls this ‘the orthodox undergraduate view of Hobbes’. See Glover, Willis B. “God and Thomas Hobbes” in *Hobbes Studies*, Harvard 1965, pg. 142. Glover thinks Hobbes was a theist. Edwin Curley, expresses the same idea, what he calls the view held by “philosophers on the street”, but goes on to argue that this kneejerk, even naïve response, is ultimately the correct one. See Curley, Edwin, “Religion and Morality in Hobbes” in *Rational Commitment and Social Justice: Essays for George Kavka*, Jules L. Coleman and Christopher W. Morris, eds. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998: 90–121. pgs. 90–91. What strikes Curley as ironic is that the specialists seem to miss the forest for the trees.

We should be plain with the issues here. Short of a discovery in some archive or private library, there is no smoking gun.³⁶⁶ Hobbes never said in print or to someone who recorded it that he did or did not believe in the Christian god; nor did he say explicitly that he wrote in a misleading or ironic way.³⁶⁷ Thus, we will not be able to ascertain beyond all doubt what Hobbes believed in his heart, assuming this was even constant throughout his life. We are left with conjecture and the interpretation of the texts and contexts. I do believe that an interpretation that highlights the use of irony in Hobbes' text is well-supported and insightful.

Strauss and Curley

If Hobbes was an atheist in his contemporaries' eyes, they must have seen evidence of irony or insincerity in his writings. Modern readers discover traces of Hobbes' irreligion by detecting irony as well. The first author one should consider when discussing a hidden meaning in a philosophy text is Leo Strauss.

In "Persecution and the Art of Writing" Strauss considers the question of "writing between the lines".³⁶⁸ He begins from the idea of persecution, where ideas exist that would put their author at personal risk if they appeared in print in a literal and straightforward way. Persecution necessitates that a thinker in such a situation leans to "write between the lines" and put his or her true meaning behind a mask.

³⁶⁶ This is not impossible, the *Anti White* wasn't rediscovered until the late 20th Century.

³⁶⁷ Aubrey has some interesting notes, which we will consider below.

³⁶⁸ Strauss, Leo, "Persecution and the Art of Writing" in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973 [1952], 22–37.

Strauss argues that “The real opinion of an author is not necessarily identical with that which he expresses in the largest number of passages.”³⁶⁹ He elaborates:

One is not entitled to delete a passage, nor to emend its text, before one has fully considered all reasonable possibilities of understanding the passage as it stands—one of these possibilities being that the passage may be ironic. If a master of the art of writing commits such blunders as would shame an intelligent high school boy, it is reasonable to assume that they are intentional, especially if the author discusses, however incidentally, the possibility of intentional blunders in writing.³⁷⁰

A little later, he adds to the methodology:

if an able writer who has a clear mind and a perfect knowledge of the orthodox view and all its ramifications, contradicts surreptitiously and as it were in passing one of its necessary presuppositions or consequences which he explicitly recognizes and maintains everywhere else, we can reasonably suspect that he was opposed to the orthodox system as such—we must study his whole book all over again, with much greater care and much less naïveté than ever before.³⁷¹

Since many thinkers in the 17th Century wanted to abolish persecution, they concealed their ideas with only perfunctory guile. “It is therefore comparatively easy to read between the lines of their work.” Strauss notes that “I am thinking of Hobbes in particular” here.³⁷² (In the Ancient World, the approach was far different.)

Strauss’ article is critical of a current scholarly mindset, which resists the appreciation of the role of irony in historical texts. A culture unused to persecution quickly and quietly forgets that it was a fact of life in other times and places, and adopts modes of criticism which display that amnesia. Everything becomes literal, and the ironic understandings of earlier generations become illegible or confused. What parades itself as innovation is in fact a great step backward.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., pg. 30.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid., pg. 32.

³⁷² Ibid., pg. 34 and 34n15, respectively.

The difficulty of a Straussian interpretation arises from the fact that it is nearly impossible to prove, using the resources of a text itself, whether or not there is irony present. In fact, Strauss acknowledges that “It must...be considered possible that reading between the lines will not lead to complete agreement among all scholars.”³⁷³

While I am interested here in Strauss primarily for his methodology, he had no shortage of opinions on Hobbes’ sincerity. In *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, Strauss devotes a chapter to exploring the movement in Hobbes’ political treatises away from Anglican conventions, arguing that “he was a little a believing Christian then as later”, and that in his works sought to “replace natural theology by a pretended revealed theology.”³⁷⁴ Elsewhere, Strauss tells us that “Hobbes teaches... ‘direct atheism’” in natural theology and that he “attempts to refute revealed religion...by attempting to prove that the content of the Biblical revelation is against reason.”³⁷⁵ In fact, Strauss maintains that Hobbes is an atheist through almost all of his writings on the thinker.³⁷⁶

I will rely on Edwin Curley’s masterful article “‘ I Durst Not Write So Boldly’ or How to Read Hobbes’ Theological-Political Treatise” for the best example of reading between the lines of *Leviathan*. Curley considers in exhaustive detail the “Straussian reading of Hobbes.”³⁷⁷ He begins from an anecdote in Aubrey’s *Brief Lives*:

³⁷³ Strauss, Leo, “Persecution and the Art of Writing”, pg. 30.

³⁷⁴ Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, pgs. 74 and 77, respectively.

³⁷⁵ Strauss, “On the Basis of Hobbes’s Political Philosophy”, pgs. 183 and 187, respectively.

³⁷⁶ I refer the reader to Curley’s work, cited below, footnote 3, pg. 498 which offers an excellent summary of the total of Strauss’ ruminations on the matter. Curley thinks that Strauss does not mention the quote from Aubrey that occasions his title, but I think there is an at least oblique reference to it

³⁷⁷ Curley, Edwin. “‘ I Durst Not Write So Boldly’ or How to Read Hobbes’ Theological-Political Treatise” in *Hobbes and Spinoza: Science and Politics: Proceedings of the Innational Conference, Urbino, October 14–17, 1988*. Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1992. 497–593.

When Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* first came out (1670), Mr. Edmund Waller sent it to my lord of Devonshire and desired him to send him word of what Mr. Hobbes said of it. Mr. H. told his lordship: -- Ne judicate ne judicemini ["Judge not that ye not be judged"] – Matthew 7:1) He told me he had outthrowne him a bar's length for he durst not write so boldly.³⁷⁸

(The reference is to a game of strength where a bar was thrown for distance.) In other words, Spinoza wrote more directly about certain issues that Hobbes dared to. What Curley proceeds to do is to compare several issues in Hobbes's *Leviathan* and Spinoza's *Treatise*, all dealing with religion, to see if Spinoza was in fact "bolder". He concludes that there is "quite a lot in Spinoza's work which Hobbes might have found to be bolder", but more importantly, "that where Spinoza's position is more radical, Hobbes' less radical position is often stated in a way suggesting irony". This irony is a defense against persecution and a way to allude to scandalous positions. And it allows Hobbes to retain his place among the secular theorists of early modernity, against his recent critics who would return him to the fold.³⁷⁹

Curley relies throughout on the discovery of a ironic rhetorical device at work in Hobbes, which he calls "suggestion by disavowal". A clear example of this in Hobbes is in Chapter 33 of *Leviathan*, where Hobbes discusses the fact that the Scriptures were for a long time solely in the hands of ambitious and deceitful priests who could have altered them to their ends, he concludes "I see not therefore any reason to doubt but that the Old and New Testament, as we have them now, are the true registers of those things which were done and said by the prophets and apostles." (L33.20/257). After having lead us by the nose to the obvious conclusion that "priests altered the Scriptures to their advantage" Hobbes retreats from the brink, leaving readers to decide for themselves. He never explicitly says what would

³⁷⁸ Ibid., pg. 498.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., pg. 512.

be controversial, in fact he denies it. Thus “this rhetorical strategy has the advantage that the author is not required to defend the conclusion she disavows”; the author has “plausible deniability”!³⁸⁰ This is clearly one of the reasons why Hobbes adopted the dialogue format, however inelegantly, in his later writings.

Curley considers the following areas in comparison with Spinoza: (1) the general account of religion, (2) his discussion of prophecy, (3) miracles, and (4) Scriptural authority. In all four areas, Spinoza makes explicit what Hobbes leaves to the reader. Or analyses of these areas, informed by Curley’s readings among others, should illustrate the skepticism that Hobbes injects into those areas.

Consider briefly the discussion of Scriptural authority. Since the end of the time of miracles, Hobbes argues, we are left with only the Scriptures as our guide to morals and to salvation. Hobbes undermines the authority of the Scriptures in four ways: (1) he disputes that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, (2) he disputes the authorship of the book of *Job*, (3) he questions the nature of the canonical Scripture, and (4) he challenges the reliability of the narrative of miracles.

(1) By turning to textual analysis of the Bible and noting inconsistencies in the text, Hobbes concludes that Moses was not the (sole) author of the Pentateuch, which was “nearly universally held by his contemporaries.”³⁸¹ Hobbes, “does, to some extent, pull his

³⁸⁰ Ibid., pg. 519.

³⁸¹ Ibid., pg. 560.

punches.”³⁸² Spinoza is “much bolder”, he argues that the Books “could only have been written by someone who lived many generations later.”³⁸³

(2) Hobbes reads *Job* as “a philosophical treatise on the problem of the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the good” not as a historical document.³⁸⁴ Hobbes notes this is reflected in the literary style of the Book, which alternates between prose and verse. Again, “Spinoza is less cautious,” he agrees more forcefully with Hobbes’ points and goes so far as to say that “the style of the poetry is gentile in character.”³⁸⁵

(3) We have already seen how Hobbes stops short of saying that the books of the canon were altered to the benefit of priests, although he alludes to it. Spinoza questions the logic of inclusion and exclusion of the books of Scripture into the canon itself, and wonders of possible corruption of both message and text.

(4) Hobbes claims we can only *believe*, and not *know* with certainty, that the events in the Bible transpired as written. We have everything on hearsay, and as Hobbes has been at great pains to show us elsewhere, there are plenty of ways to mistake a natural event for a miraculous one. But we must trust that the sovereign will approve the correct texts. Spinoza claims the text is “full of faults, mutilated, corrupted, and inconsistent, that we only have fragments of it”.³⁸⁶

Much the same is true for Hobbes’ other arguments. Where Hobbes insinuates, Spinoza declares. The two seem to agree on most points, except transparency. While even

³⁸² Ibid., pg. 558.

³⁸³ Ibid., pgs. 560, 561.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., pg. 563.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., pgs. 564, 565.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., pg. 570, Curley quoting Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.

Spinoza is not perfectly frank, he is far bolder, and Hobbes certainly could have admired his audacity on these and other points. Leibniz, Curley notes, perceived a genetic relationship between these two texts, and it is clear that Spinoza knew his Hobbes.³⁸⁷

Curley is sure to note, “The fact that Hobbes openly expressed ‘minority opinions sure to involve him in some controversy’ is sometimes made an argument for his sincerity, apparently on the theory that if Hobbes was prepared to accept the consequences of openly stating *some* unpopular views, he could not have intended to indirectly suggest others even more unpopular. But this seems to me a complete *non sequiter*.”³⁸⁸ As a strict point of logic, Curley is correct. And certainly it makes sense that Hobbes could be willing to be seen to challenge what for a lack of a better term we might call superstructural elements of Christianity, like the immortality of the soul, but would be hesitant to attack the base: the idea of Christ himself or the totality of the authority of the Scriptures. *Leviathan*’s text was emboldened by a lack of censorship and consensus among a fundamentally Christian population, not a lack of Christianity among a fundamentally skeptical population!

Curley is willing to bite the bullet and claim that “I think Hobbes was probably an atheist, but that at a minimum he was deeply skeptical about Christianity, and about theism in general, and that seeing *that* is essential to understanding *Leviathan*.”³⁸⁹ Quentin Skinner will use almost the exact same language in his discussion of Hobbes’ style to follow.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., pg 571

³⁸⁸ Ibid., pg. 516. The cite is to Glover.

³⁸⁹ Curley, “Religion and Morality in Hobbes”, pg. 91.

Martinich

The best place to start for contemporary discussions of a sincere, theist, Christian Hobbes are the writings of AP Martinich, especially his book, *The Two Gods of Leviathan*.³⁹⁰ Martinich argues that Hobbes was a sincere, orthodox, but nonstandard Christian. “He may not have had a strong emotional commitment to religion. He may not have had a strong attachment to the rituals of any denomination...But he certainly had a strong intellectual commitment to religion.”³⁹¹

By “orthodox”, Martinich means that Hobbes clung to the minimal standard of orthodoxy outlined in laws passed in the time of Queen Elizabeth that required adherence to the canonical Scriptures and the first four church councils as the standard for orthodoxy.³⁹² But his views are nonstandard. “The standard views are the received, or mainstream, religious opinions of a particular time and place.”³⁹³ Hobbes was clearly not in the mainstream of his era’s belief system, a fact even he would probably not dispute; hence on Martinich’s interpretation Hobbes was nonstandard, but orthodox. Martinich thinks that the failure to appreciate the different scope of these two terms is the cause of so much confusion and frustration in Hobbes studies.

Martinich summarizes what he takes Hobbes’ project to be as follows:

Hobbes was trying to answer the challenge that the new science of Copernicus and Galileo posed for religion and to prevent the abuse of religion for political purposes. Hobbes’s goal with respect to these two issues was (1) to show that the distinctively religious content of the

³⁹⁰ Martinich, AP. *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Other prominent figures in the 20th Century include AE Taylor, FC Hood, and Howard Warrender.

³⁹¹ Ibid., pg. 1.

³⁹² See for instance, the Act of Supremacy, article 20 in *Documents of the English Reformation*, pg. 327.

³⁹³ Op cit., pg. 2.

Bible could be reconciled with the new science and (2) to prove that religion could not legitimately be used to destabilize a government.³⁹⁴

Martinich offers a painstaking, historical analysis intended to show how Hobbes' thought fits into the range of nonstandard Christianity. He concludes that "Hobbes was a Calvinist".³⁹⁵ Furthermore, "Hobbes subscribed to a divine command theory of morality."³⁹⁶ Hobbes' "orthodoxy and Calvinist theology make him a religious conservative".³⁹⁷

Martinich concludes that Hobbes' project was a failure, that he could not hold the new science and Christianity together under tension, and that "on the whole his views fit into a long tradition that tended to undermine it, often contrary to the intentions of authors."³⁹⁸ Hobbes was like those other thinkers, who "Despite their best efforts to save the intellectual respectability of Christian doctrine, they contributed to its downfall."³⁹⁹ This, of course, does not change the fact for Martinich that he believed he could reconcile the two.

Martinich has conceded a lot to those who argue that Hobbes was a nonbeliever. He is not sure if Hobbes was especially passionate or devout. He agrees that Hobbes kept himself within a much narrower, legalistic definition of orthodoxy than many of his contemporaries. He accepts that Hobbes held unusual beliefs for the Christians of his time. He sees Hobbes' aim as trying to square religion with science, and to eliminate the intellectual foundations of disobedience to the sovereign. He accepts that in the final analysis this reconciliation could not be done because the subject matter was too disparate, and that in fact Hobbes' efforts backfired, and undermined Christianity. Martinich's major

³⁹⁴ Ibid., pg. 3.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., pg. 334.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., pg. 335.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., pg. 336.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., pg. 8.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., pg. 337.

disagreement with the atheist interpretation of Hobbes stems from the fact that he believes that Hobbes acted in good faith, and did not employ irony with regard to his fundamental beliefs.

Martinich devoted an Appendix in his book to address Curley's article. The Appendix accuses Curley of, among other things, reading tendentiously in support of his ironic reading. Comparing Curley with the Grand Inquisitor of *The Brothers Karamazov*, Martinich argues that he "is illegitimately interpreting the speaker to mean the opposite of what he says, merely in order to get the words uttered to fit their interpretation."⁴⁰⁰

Martinich believes that the inaugural conceit of Curley's article, the anecdote from Aubrey is "so cryptic and vague that we have no idea what specifically he [Hobbes] was talking about." Curley's project is "fruitless".⁴⁰¹

Martinich reviews several of the claims Curley had made about Hobbes, and offers a pious reading of each of them. But his most powerful objection is that he believes Curley "operates with a defective idea of how to recognize irony."⁴⁰² Martinich pleads for a stronger consideration of the context of the passages on which Curley's case for irony is built, where it will be seen, he says, that "The vast amount of what Hobbes wrote about religion is on the face of it favorable to religion or presupposes it. Given this general appearance of approval, a few allegedly dubious passages cannot be used to drive an interpretation."⁴⁰³

Martinich and Curley exchanged further intellectual blows in the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* in 1996, where Curley was given the chance to respond to Martinich's Appendix

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., pg. 352.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., pg. 339.

⁴⁰² Ibid., pg. 351.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

addressing his work. Curley aggressively and with gusto defends his view against the viewpoint espoused in the *Two Gods of Leviathan* in an article entitled “Calvin and Hobbes, or, Hobbes as an Orthodox Christian”.⁴⁰⁴

Curley problematizes Martinich’s definition of orthodoxy by illustrating various areas where the creeds of the first four church councils are unhelpful or where Hobbes, in spite of adhering to the letter of the creeds, seems well out of step with his peers. He “concedes” that “if we adopt his plausible definition of ‘orthodoxy’, and we take Hobbes at his word, Hobbes must have been an orthodox Christian.”⁴⁰⁵ Yet this avoids the question of “whether we should take Hobbes at his word.”⁴⁰⁶ Curley certainly thinks the creeds are too weak a foundation to determine “orthodoxy”. I agree, the creeds are too narrow and the definition Hobbes clings to seems more like a legal loophole (it is gave him that much protection) than anything else. Hobbes seems to have gerrymandered a little to retain the appearance of orthodoxy.

Curley notes “The kind of irony I claimed to find in *Leviathan* places the responsibility for drawing the right conclusion on the reader.”⁴⁰⁷ Given this onus, we can expect different readers to interpret the text in different ways. As Strauss said, even the experts will disagree. Martinich and Curley’s disagreement here is an example of divergent readers creating divergent interpretation.

⁴⁰⁴ Curley, Edwin. “Calvin and Hobbes, or, Hobbes as an Orthodox Christian” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 34(2) April 1996. 257–271. The title alone gives away some of Curley’s intent. He deliberately affects a sarcastic, ironic, and humorous (at times) tone. Curley is attempting to illustrate how such techniques are employed by an author in practice. He does this in a rather transparent manner to quickly elicit in the reader an awareness of the method at work. There does seem to be an element of *ad hominem* in the discussion, which I will ignore at the moment.

⁴⁰⁵ Curley, “Calvin and Hobbes”, pg. 261.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., pg. 262.

Martinich professes to read ironically only if the literal interpretation makes no sense. But Curley argues that an ironic “strategy can only work if the literal interpretation makes *some* sense.”⁴⁰⁸

He reiterates that Hobbes writings “seem to demonstrate a tendency to vacillate on important religious themes, and some would say this should make us suspicious.”⁴⁰⁹ Curley’s argument consists of introducing further examples of irony in Hobbes, focusing this time on the Nicene Creed and the Trinity. He “catches” Hobbes in a flat out falsehood in his discussion of the creed and assumes he could not possibly have been so careless. When Hobbes claims there is no Greek philosophy in the Creed, he cannot have ignored *homoousia*. Hobbes’ account of the Trinity, claims Curley, is so scandalous he could not have expected readers to take it seriously.

Martinich’s reply elaborates on his appreciation of the role of irony in a text like *Leviathan*. He does concede that Curley is right that a literal meaning must have some plausibility if irony is to work. But he thinks that Curley is cherry picking his “contradictions” to prove his theory. After all, “Hobbes contradicted himself on nonreligious issues, about which it is clear he was not being ironic. To focus only on the apparent religious contradictions would be to commit the fallacy of special pleading.”⁴¹⁰

Furthermore, Hobbes was all too human at times:

Hobbes wrote, “Who is so stupid as both to mistake in Geometry, and also to persist in it, when another detects his error to him?” ...Hobbes was. Even when several mathematicians

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., pg. 263.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., pg. 264.

⁴¹⁰ Martinich, AP, “On the Proper Interpretation of Hobbes’s Philosophy” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 34(2) April 1996. 273–283.

pointed out his errors to him, he could not come to see that he was wrong. So he did not merely assert a contradiction, he tenaciously asserted one.⁴¹¹

Thus, “For all of his brilliance, Hobbes was sometimes confused and sometimes stubbornly obtuse.”⁴¹² Curley would grant this, but it does not undermine his larger point that there can be genuine inconsistencies and intentional ones. When inconsistencies recur, this is a problem.

Martinich adds that there is a further interpretive problem,

Hobbes expected some readers to recognize that he was being ironic (atheists, agnostics, and/or deists) and other readers not to recognize this (Christians). Oddly, the evidence strongly suggests that those who thought they recognized that Hobbes was being ironic were by and large Christians.⁴¹³

I think Martinich is mischaracterizing the situation here. Hobbes expected *intelligent* (and educated) readers to be able to see his purposes, but to be able to disavow that he actually upheld those purposes if the authorities became involved. He wanted “plausible denial” as has been said. Moreover, we do know that many Christians saw the implications of his views, but we are unable to determine how many unbelievers actually saw them, because irreligion was not something public. “This is the fundamental reason why there are so few atheists to be found: not because there were no atheists, but because the atheists themselves believed they were obliged to pretend to be Christians.”⁴¹⁴

Even if people took him to be ironic, Martinich argues, that no more proves that he was “than the converse fact that some people took Swift as serious when he was being

⁴¹¹ Ibid., pg. 275–276.

⁴¹² Ibid., pg. 276.

⁴¹³ Ibid., pg. 277.

⁴¹⁴ Wootton, “Unbelief in Early Modern Europe”. Pg. 88.

ironic” in a *Modest Proposal*.⁴¹⁵ Except that we can consider the intellectual talent of some of Hobbes’ readers, many of whom had similar educational backgrounds and many of whom were widely regarded as insightful people.

Martinich defends his interpretation of Hobbes’ account of the trinity as sincere, claiming “Hobbes wanted to show the power of his novel theory of personhood by using it to explain the doctrine of the Trinity”.⁴¹⁶ He dismisses Curley’s argument about the Nicene Creed on a grammatical technicality.

For Curley, this response only digs Martinich deeper in the hole. He retrenches and reiterates his opinions on the Nicene Creed and the Trinity in his “Reply to Professor Martinich”, adding two comments. First that *homoousia* is not the only philosophical term in the Nicene Creed and two, that “it does seem a tad bit dangerous to say that [“so much for the Trinity”] at a time when an open denial of the doctrine of the Trinity might land him in jail on charges of Blasphemy.”⁴¹⁷

The two remain at loggerheads, and it illustrates the difficulty of a Straussian reading, difficulties of which Straussians are aware. If it were possible to prove that a text is ironic beyond a shadow of a doubt, irony loses its value and is effectively literal. It is entirely possible that Curley, and many others, are wrong about particular points being ironic. Nonetheless, it strikes me as implausible that they are wrong about all of them. Furthermore,

⁴¹⁵ Op cit., pg. 278.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., pg. 279.

⁴¹⁷ Curley, Edwin. “Reply to Professor Martinich” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 34(2) April 1996. 285–287, pg. 286. Hobbes was criticized for his doctrine of the trinity in the English *Leviathan*, he added a discussion of the issue in the Latin *Leviathan*, expressing his concern for piety. The latter was published in 1668, after the Restoration. The Bill to have Hobbes investigated for heresy and atheism was brought before Parliament in 1666. The freedom under which *Leviathan* had originally been composed no longer existed.

it seems likely, given the widespread existence of ironic writing styles at the time, that Hobbes would have known about them and employed them if he had dangerous ideas (we consider this below). It strikes me as plausible that the unforced, “natural” judgment of so many intelligent and careful readers concurring on skeptical themes in Hobbes is favorable to the interpretations of scholars with literal-reading methodologies.

George Wright makes an interesting intervention in this debate in his article “Curley and Martinich in Dubious Battle”.⁴¹⁸ He argues that “the Curley/Martinich dispute displays a concern over Hobbes’s inner beliefs disproportionate to the profit to be gained in settling the question, granting that were possible.”⁴¹⁹ And, “as the Curley/Martinich exchange shows, any evidence as to Hobbes’s sincerity in the text can be read in (at least) two ways....” Thus, “we should not be surprised at the somewhat exasperated tone of the exchange; not easy to signal, sincerity is not easy to determine.”⁴²⁰ Elsewhere, about Hobbes’ sincerity he admits “I do not think we can know.”⁴²¹ But Hobbes’ personal sincerity is besides the point for him.

Wright argues that if we pay attention to the structure of Hobbes’ arguments, his *personal* opinions ultimately do not matter. “Even if he sought to signal them (which I doubt), Hobbes’s subjective states of mind are of little importance in comparison with the structure and elaboration of the arguments found in his writings.”⁴²² Keep in mind, he says

⁴¹⁸ Wright, George. “Curley and Martinich in Dubious Battle”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 40 (4) 2002: 461–472.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 476.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 466.

⁴²¹ Wright, George. “The Haunting of Thomas Hobbes” in *Religion, Politics, and Thomas Hobbes*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2006. 211–245, pg. 245. Wright’s larger point in his article is to claim that “All of Hobbes’s treatments of the chief tenets of Christianity reflect a desire to formulate the tenets of Christian theology in ways that avoid what he identified as the familiar Greek dualisms of body and spirit, time and eternity, ideal and real.” (pg. 231) Hobbes was “de-Hellenizing” Christianity, an argument he also affirms in Wright, “Dubious Battle”, pg. 469.

⁴²² *Op cit.*, pg. 470.

“As complicated as the deceptive ambiguity strategy is when only the messages sent are simultaneous avowal and disavowal, it attains Byzantine complexity when the signs signal both those messages *and* advance the larger argument.”⁴²³ In other words, it is difficult to make a sustained argument, if you sabotage the premises at every turn.

Obviously, Wright makes a point. *Leviathan* has a determinant argumentative structure, that takes Christian theology seriously enough to redescribe it point-by-point. We must be clear about what hidden messages we see in Hobbes and how these line up with the actual arguments in the book. But the Straussians insist that the signals occur at the margins, or in passing. They need not disrupt a larger argumentative structure. Hobbes’ tendentious reading of Christian texts and theology to conform to his materialism and political theory seems apparent if we examine what he includes and excludes, what he distorts in the traditional view, and how convenient some of his new interpretations are for these wider goals. Hobbes’ challenges Christianity on two levels: first by making it work on its own terms with his physics and politics, and second, by challenging its ultimate validity in sarcastic asides and petty inconsistencies.

The deepest hidden message I see in *Leviathan* is that politics depends on and must direct religion. This Hobbes gets from Machiavelli, as we will see below. But first, a detour through eloquence.

⁴²³ Ibid., pg. 468.

Rhetoric

Our argument for an ironic reading of *Leviathan* gains further credibility when we consider the scholarship on Hobbes' rhetoric. Work by David Johnston and Quentin Skinner looms large in this area.

Johnston, in *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, argues that "*Leviathan* was designed less as a scientific treatise than as a work of rhetoric...In writing this work Hobbes was, above all else, performing a political act, not a scientific one."⁴²⁴

Johnston argues that Hobbes possessed "a keen interest in and sensitivity for the transmission of ideas...in 'instruction' (broadly conceived) as opposed to inquiry."⁴²⁵ Hobbes understood that propositional arguments are inherently "weak media for the transmission of ideas."⁴²⁶ Rhetorical skill is necessary for logically sound, scientifically-justified arguments to be truly convincing. Both are essential for a political theory.

For Johnston *Leviathan* is the high water mark of Hobbes' rhetorical, educational flourish, the method by which he hoped to attain the "cultural transformation" that supplies the subtitle to his book. *Leviathan* "is an intensely polemical work with literary qualities comparable to those of the most esteemed works in the whole of English literature."⁴²⁷ There Hobbes, "attempts to synthesize the new science's methods of reason as applied to

⁴²⁴ Johnston, David. *The Rhetoric of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Cultural Transformation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, pg. 91.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., pg 24.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., pg. 67.

politics with the older lessons of the rhetorical tradition.”⁴²⁸ In the *Elements* and *De Cive*, Hobbes had not yet committed fully to the rhetorical, political mode of exposition.

Hobbes came to see that political philosophy’s “ultimate aim must be to shape public opinion at large, if only by educating the educators.”⁴²⁹ *Leviathan* reflects Hobbes’ growing concern with public opinion. Much more space is devoted to the discussion of sedition and the sovereign’s responsibility to contain it, starting at the Universities. The concept of authorization for the sovereign was a major innovation in Hobbes’ theory, one with a distinctive legitimizing role.

From the get-go *Leviathan* was intended for the reading public at large, not some small fragment of it. “It was perhaps the first work in the history of political philosophy to be designed entirely with this aim in mind.”⁴³⁰

These concerns animate Hobbes’ account of religion, says Johnston. Hobbes was concerned with the power of Christianity to mold public opinion against the sovereign. Consider his interpretation of Scripture. “The fact is that Hobbes considered the Bible, or at least certain interpretations of it, to be the chief agent and carrier of superstitious beliefs in his time.”⁴³¹ Hobbes sought to fit Christianity into his political program. “The radicalism of his reinterpretation of the Scriptures was simply one element in a larger design: to transform his readers into more rational and predictable beings, and by doing so to make them better suited for membership in a new kind of political society.”⁴³²

⁴²⁸ Ibid., pg. 25.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., pg. 77.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., pg. 89.

⁴³¹ Ibid., pg. 136.

⁴³² Ibid., pg. 137.

Johnston points out similar goals and argumentation with regard to Hobbes' new account of the soul and "magic" (which includes prophecy and miracles). Hobbes often proceeds indirectly, arguing in such a way as to sow doubt in the reader about, say, the existence of miracles, without directly proving they cannot exist. Johnston argues that by working in this indirect way, with canonical ideas being accepted by subject to skepticism, Hobbes could retain his audience's attention and have them do the work for him. "As a rhetorical strategy, it was far more effective to accept that authority ostensibly and by raising doubts in the minds of his readers, to turn it toward his own purpose."⁴³³ But there is no doubt that Hobbes' aim "was to subvert many of the most central tents of Christian theology, Protestant as well as Catholic, and to replace them with Hobbes's own rationalized version of Christian doctrine."⁴³⁴

Hobbes' skillfully outflanked his opponents in a time where a frontal assault would have been "literally suicidal for him to do so."⁴³⁵

Johnston argues that Hobbes goes beyond founding a mere civil religion based on modified Christian principles, that he seeks to radically refashion religion so that it would transform human nature itself into something more rational and peaceful.

Quentin Skinner's larger thesis in his magnificent *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* is to demonstrate that Hobbes made a complete reversal in his estimation of the value of rhetoric to political theory. In the *Elements* and *De Cive*, Hobbes holds rhetoric in

⁴³³ Ibid, pg. 181.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

disdain and elevates reason above all. By the time he writes *Leviathan*, he comes to believe that “reason is of small power in the absence of eloquence.”⁴³⁶

But for our purposes, it suffices to indicate the profound and systematic use of classical rhetorical devices used in that work. Skinner demonstrates, quite ably and exhaustively, that Hobbes employs all of the tropes and techniques of neo-Ciceronian rhetoric to a high level of proficiency and effect. Every stylistic device is employed in *Leviathan* and Skinner catalogues every one.⁴³⁷

Skinner argues that “The *Leviathan* constitutes a belated but magnificent contribution to the Renaissance art of eloquence”.⁴³⁸ Speaking of the work later on he adds, that “the English version of 1651 must rank among other things as a *masterpiece* of satire and invective, embodying as it does a systematic application of the techniques evolved by the theorists of rhetoric for speaking with ridicule and contempt.”⁴³⁹

Hobbes’ later political philosophy, for Skinner, depends on the union of scientific principles with rhetorical power. Hobbes, after “having initially abandoned rhetoric in favor of science, he eventually sought to found his civil science on combining them.”⁴⁴⁰

This has direct bearing on the understanding of his religious beliefs. Skinner notes that “lack of attention to Hobbes’s rhetorical strategies has arguably given rise to a number of over-simplified interpretations of his religious beliefs, especially his beliefs about the

⁴³⁶ Skinner, Quentin. *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pg. 376.

⁴³⁷ See Chapter 10 in the book, 376–425 for the voluminous catalog.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., pg. 4.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., pg. 395, emphasis mine.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., pg. 12.

veracity of the Bible and the mysteries of the Christian faith.”⁴⁴¹ But because “Hobbes makes systematic use of various devices specifically recommended by the theorists of eloquence for contriving a tone of irony and ridicule.”⁴⁴² And it “is in dealing with his religious antagonists that Hobbes makes the fullest play with the inversions typical of ironic speech.”⁴⁴³

Hence,

to think of Hobbes’s prose as a clear window through which we can gaze uninterruptedly at his thought is a serious mistake. Hobbes’s thought in *Leviathan* is mediated by a prose in which the techniques of *ornatus* are used to produce a large number of deliberately ambiguous effects. To fail to recognize this fact is to fail to recognize what kind of a work we have in our hands.⁴⁴⁴

This confirms what we already knew, that Hobbes was a master stylist. And that style can conceal a thinker’s ideas. Johnston and especially Skinner merely “show their work”. While the two have their disagreements, I think they make their point.⁴⁴⁵

Bramhall and Clarendon

It is an anachronism to called men who were contemporaries of Hobbes “Straussians”, but they were used to reading as such, if only in the pursuit of the impious. As David Wootton argues “All contemporaries agreed, for example, that *Leviathan* was an attack on Christianity. We know that unbelievers read such books with an eye to what they took to

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., pg. 13–14.

⁴⁴² Ibid., pg. 14.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., pg. 404.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., pg. 13.

⁴⁴⁵ Johnston and Skinner disagree on whether or not Hobbes changed his mind about rhetoric. Johnston believes he did not, Skinner maintains the opposite. Johnston does believe *Leviathan* exemplifies the rhetorical strategy most. Johnston maintains the book is primarily a political act of rhetoric, as opposed to a scientific treatise, whereas Skinner sees *Leviathan* as embodying both science and eloquence. When push comes to shove, I side with Skinner’s analysis on both points. Skinner’s approach, of course, has the benefit of reacting to Johnston’s work.

be their hidden, true significance.”⁴⁴⁶ Hobbes’ readers often display an uncanny ability to isolate ideas and themes in Hobbes that have the kind of implications Straussians drool over. We now turn to two of them for help.

I have chosen to focus here on John Bramhall’s *The Catching of the Leviathan, or The Great Whale* (1658) and Clarendon’s *Brief Survey and Survey of the Dangerous and Pernicious Errors to Church and State, in Mr. Hobbes’s Book, Entitled Leviathan* (1676) for several reasons.⁴⁴⁷ Both men knew Hobbes personally, Bramhall (as we have seen) from the debates on liberty and necessity, Clarendon from their earlier association at Great Tew, whilst in exile, and later as adversaries.⁴⁴⁸ Both men were the highly educated elite that could follow Hobbes line-by-line, whether through Scripture or History, Theology or Natural Philosophy, in English or in Latin. Both men read widely in Hobbes’ work, and are attentive to detail and continuity of the texts. Retrieving their insights on Hobbes from history will be a benefit to the modern reader. Finally, both men, it must be confessed, are entertaining writers.

The Catching of the Leviathan consists of three chapters. The first argues that Hobbes’ principles are destructive of religion, the second argues that Hobbes’ principles undermine government, and the third accuses Hobbes of contradicting himself. Bramhall styles these chapters as “harping irons” (harpoons) directed at the heart, his “chine” (backbone)⁴⁴⁹, and

⁴⁴⁶ Wootton, pg. 97.

⁴⁴⁷ Hereafter, I will cite Bramhall’s pamphlet as “Catching” and Clarendon’s book as “Survey”.

⁴⁴⁸ For an enlightening discussion of Clarendon’s relationship with Hobbes, see Zagorin, Perez. “Clarendon and Hobbes” *Journal of Modern History* 57 (Dec. 1985): 593–616. Zagorin argues convincingly that Hobbes was not a member of the Tew Circle, although he friendly with some of its members.

⁴⁴⁹ See the OED, “The spine, backbone, or vertebral column; more loosely ‘the part of the back in which the spine is found’

his head, respectively. As one can see, even from his titular metaphor, Bramhall “possessed a style which was both hard-hitting and picturesque.”⁴⁵⁰

Bramhall claims that Hobbes’ “principles are brim full of prodigious impiety”⁴⁵¹ and as a chief example he offers the following passage in *De Cive*, where Hobbes writes: “Without special assistance from God, it proved almost impossible to avoid the twin rocks of Atheism and superstition; for the latter proceeds from fear without right reason, the former from an opinion of reason without fear.” (DC.16.1/187). Bramhall seized upon this as evidence of Hobbes’ tolerance for, if not inward expression of, atheism.⁴⁵² (Incidentally, Strauss notes the same passage approvingly in his book on Hobbes.⁴⁵³)

Bramhall fires away at Hobbes, that, “his God is not the God of Christians, nor of any rational man.”⁴⁵⁴ Bramhall argues that Hobbes denies the ubiquity of God, his immutability, his simplicity, even his existence. Hobbes denies his eternity as well.⁴⁵⁵ The ground of this assertion is “That there is no incorporeal spirit, is the main root of Atheisme, from which so many branches are sprouting up.”⁴⁵⁶ In other words, Hobbes’ materialism entails that God himself is material (this is before Hobbes admits it in the Appendix to the Latin *Leviathan* in 1668), which renders all of those orthodox attributes of God false. A material God cannot be everywhere at once, he would be subject to transformation, he

⁴⁵⁰ Bowle, John. *Hobbes and His Critics: A Study in Seventeenth Century Constitutionalism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1952. pg. 28.

⁴⁵¹ Bramhall, *Catching*, pg. 117.

⁴⁵² Bramhall, *Catching*, pg. 117–118.

⁴⁵³ Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, pg. 77.

⁴⁵⁴ Bramhall, *Catching*, pg. 119.

⁴⁵⁵ This occurs in Chapter 3, where Bramhall draws the conclusion that if God exists in time, as Hobbes asserts, he cannot be infinite, “Infinite is that to which nothing can be added, but to that which subsisteth by successive duration, something is added every minute.” (Bramhall, *Catching*, pg. 169).

⁴⁵⁶ Bramhall, *Catching*, pg. 121.

would be divisible, and for Bramhall this is tantamount to denying that he is perfect and omnipotent, hence that God as God exists. Samuel Mintz has explored the contemporary understanding of the implications of materials for God in his study, whose title is styled after Bramhall's, *The Hunting of Leviathan*. For Hobbes' peers, materialism always entailed atheism.⁴⁵⁷

The Bishop is unrelenting, "They who deny all incorporeal substances, can understand nothing by God, but either nature...(as TH seems to intimate) or a fiction of the brain without real being, cherished for advantage and politick ends, as a profitable error".⁴⁵⁸ There is nothing stopping Hobbes (or Spinoza, for that matter) from asserting versions of both, as I think he is doing.

With regard to the Trinity, Bramhall observes with characteristic style,

The emblime of a boy attempting to lade all the water out of the sea with a Coccleshel, doth fit TH as exactly as if it had been shaped for him, who thinketh to measure the profound and inscrutable mysteries of religion by his own silly, shallow conceits. What is now become of the great adorable mysterie of the blessed undivided Trinity? it is shrunk into nothing.

Hobbes' theory of personation for Bramhall takes away both the glory and the mystery of the Trinity (a criticism Clarendon will also concur in, and which Curley makes much of).

"Neither is he more orthodox concerning the Holy Scriptures".⁴⁵⁹ Bramhall draws the implications that if the Scripture depends on sovereign authority for its canonization and authority, then first, the early Christians were criminals under Hobbes' theory, and furthermore, "if Christian Sovereigns, of different communions, do clash with one another,

⁴⁵⁷ See Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan*, Ch. 4, 5.

⁴⁵⁸ Bramhall, *Catching*, Op cit.

⁴⁵⁹ Bramhall, *Catching*, pg. 126.

in their interpretations, or misinterpretation of Scripture (as they do daily) then the word of God is contradictory to itself”, which is the same as saying it has no authority at all.⁴⁶⁰

Bramhall enumerates six “principles” of Hobbesian religion, and invites the reader to draw a conclusion, *ex ungue leonem*.⁴⁶¹

1. No one need risk his life for faith.⁴⁶² (See L42.11/338–9 and L43.23/410)
2. Subjects may deny Christ, if commanded by their sovereign. (Ibid.)
3. A Christian may commit idolatry to avoid harm or death. (“It seemeth *TH* thinketh there is no divine worship, but internal. And that it is lawful for a man to value his own life or his limbs more than his God.”⁴⁶³ [L45.22/445–6])
4. It is not true that “it is better to obey God rather than man”⁴⁶⁴ in the state of nature. (L31.39/242)
5. “[T]he sharpest and most successful sword, in any war whatsoever, doth give sovereign power and authority to him that hath it, to approve or reject all sorts of Theologicall

⁴⁶⁰ Bramhall, *Catching*, pg. 127.

⁴⁶¹ “From the claw, we may judge the lion”. In other words, Bramhall “leaves it to the freed judgement of the understanding Reader” to judge Hobbes an atheist on the basis of the principles and fragments of irreligion Bramhall presents.

⁴⁶² When Bramhall provides a passage from Hobbes, which is uncited, that affirms that Christians should at times be martyrs, Bramhall observes “But I fear all this was said in jest.” (*Catching*, 135). The passage seems to be a conglomeration of *Elements* 25.14 and *Leviathan* 43.23.

⁴⁶³ Bramhall, *Catching*, pg. 133.

⁴⁶⁴ This is a reference to Acts 5:29, as Curley indicates. Clarendon saw fit to comment briefly on this passage as well in his *Survey* (pg. 188), if only to express disapproval with how weakly Hobbes addressed it. The repetition of areas of critique may be due to Clarendon’s reading of Bramhall, but it probably reflects the inherent controversial nature of these passages to readers in Bramhall and Clarendon’s historical and cultural position.

- doctrines, concerning the Kingdome of God, not according to their truth and falsehood, but according to the influence they have upon political affairs.”⁴⁶⁵ (L38.5/305)
6. Civil laws are the only measure of Good and Evil. (This is as if “one should go about to controle the Sun by the authority of the clock.”⁴⁶⁶ Further, “Nothing could be written more false in this his sense, more dishonourable to God, more inglorious to the humane nature.”⁴⁶⁷ [L6.7/28–29, L17.2/106, L18.10/114])

All of these principles are indeed (more or less) found in Hobbes. Bramhall discusses them polemically, but he is being fair to Hobbes in citation. All of these “principles” are offensive to Bramhall’s religious sensibilities. They imply relativism, dishonesty, and impiety.

Bramhall summarizes his opinion of Hobbes’ religion “His whole works are a heap of misshapen errours, and absurd paradoxes, vented with the confidence of a Jugler, the brags of a Mountebanck, and the authority of some Pythagoras, or third Cato, lately dropped down from heaven.”⁴⁶⁸ The insinuation is of fraud and of distracting spectacle to cover it up.

Later he claims, “The true ground of this and many other of his mistakes, is this, That he fancieth no reality of natural justice nor honesty, nor any relation to the Law of God or nature, but only to the Laws of the Commonwealth.”⁴⁶⁹ Bramhall clearly view Hobbes as a positivist and a secularist, although he could not have used such language.

⁴⁶⁵ Bramhall, *Catching*, pg. 133.

⁴⁶⁶ Bramhall, *Catching*, pg. 136.

⁴⁶⁷ Bramhall, *Catching*, pg. 135.

⁴⁶⁸ Bramhall, *Catching*, pg. 138. A “third Cato” is a reference to Juvenal’s *Satires*, where apparently the historical Cato the Censor is ridiculed for his stubbornness.

⁴⁶⁹ Bramhall, *Catching*, pg. 154.

I omit discussion of the second chapter in detail, but move briskly through the third. Bramhall has read between the lines previously, albeit inconsistently, in the third chapter he seems to be strictly accusing Hobbes of intellectual weakness. Ironically, he provides plenty of fodder for a Straussian reader.

One of Bramhall's telling "contradictions" he finds in Hobbes is his account of the early Church, or more precisely, since "there was no Christian Sovereign in those parts of the World then...and by consequence, according to his definition, no Church."⁴⁷⁰

Bramhall notes the inconsistencies we have mentioned before between *De Cive's* account of the clergy and *Leviathan's* version, and how the power of princes increases, why the role of ordination becomes insignificant.

In summary, Hobbes has it all backwards, "making policy to be the building, and religion the hangings, which must be fashioned just according to the proportion of the policy; and (not as Mr. Cartwright would have it) making religion to the building, and policy the hangings, which must be conformed to religion."⁴⁷¹ This final chord strikes another note about Hobbes' secular, cynical intentions about religion, at least as Bramhall saw them. Bramhall sees a hidden message of atheism (or at least irreligion and skepticism) and "politick religion" animate in Hobbes' political works. He definitely has a sense of Hobbes as a showman and a man sympathetic to atheists and atheism. Bramhall seems to appreciate two levels of irreligion in Hobbes, the first being the unorthodox implications for Christianity of Hobbes' doctrines, the second being a sense that through it all, Hobbes is

⁴⁷⁰ Bramhall, *Catching*, pg. 171.

⁴⁷¹ Bramhall, *Catching*, pg. 179. The reference is to Thomas Cartwright (1535–1603) a Puritan churchman.

deceitful about his views on religion as a whole, that he is not merely unorthodox, but an unbeliever using religion for politics.

Hobbes' wrote a response to Bramhall, after the latter had died of a stroke. In *An Answer to a Book Published by Dr. Bramhall, Late Bishop of Derry, Called the "Catching of the Leviathan"*,⁴⁷² Hobbes argues that since "the words *atheism*, *impiety*, and the like, are words of the greatest defamation possible" he must write a defense of his ideas against Bramhall's accusations.⁴⁷³ Hobbes argues that Bramhall picks phrases and conclusions out of context in order to conclude Hobbes is an atheist. He defends himself at length, point-by-point, making clear statements to the effect that he is an orthodox believer. Stylistically, his metaphors rival and sometimes outshine Bramhall's own.

The work is remarkable for two reasons. The first is that Hobbes is very candid about his views. He admits, for instance, that God is "*corporeal and infinite*" on his view.⁴⁷⁴ He admits the reasons for his candor in *Leviathan*: "For when I wrote it, I may safely say there was no lawful Church in England, that could have maintained me in, or prohibited me from writing anything."⁴⁷⁵

The second reason is more germane to our undertaking here. Hobbes insists that the reader examine "the places of my *Leviathan* which he cites, and see not only how he [Bramhall] answers my arguments, but also what the arguments are which he produces against them; or else that he [the reader] would forbear to condemn, so much as in his

⁴⁷² See Molesworth, *English Works*, Volume IV, pgs. 279–384.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., pg. 282.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., pg. 306.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., pg. 355.

thought: for otherwise he is unjust.”⁴⁷⁶ (He says the after expecting most reader to only read the beginning and the end of a book). He asks, “Who that knows me, will say that I have the confidence of a juggler, or that I use to brag of anything, much less that I play the mountebank?”⁴⁷⁷ Hobbes notes that many otherwise pious people are guilty of “atheism by consequence”. It “is a very easy thing to be fallen into, even by the most godly men of the church.”⁴⁷⁸

So Hobbes, in effect, tells us what is natural to expect. “Read my arguments. I am not known for being a charlatan. If we read the consequences of people’s arguments, even the pious get themselves into trouble.” Precisely what Martinich would want us to see, and precisely what Curley would tell us Hobbes would say to cover himself.

The book ends with a segue into Hobbes’ “An historical narration concerning heresy and the punishment thereof.”

Edward Hyde, 1st Earl of Clarendon was a lawyer by training, who rose to a prominent place in English politics. He is also noted as a historian and autobiographer. Clarendon “systematically and relentlessly” engages with the *Leviathan* chapter-by-chapter, and while lacking Bramhall’s gift for fiery metaphor,⁴⁷⁹ is a clear and careful although sometimes “tedious” writer.⁴⁸⁰

Clarendon says “*Mr Hobbes* is one of the most antient acquaintance I have in the World, and of whom I alwaies had a great esteem” (Survey, 3). This does not spare him

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., pg. 382.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., pg. 384.

⁴⁷⁹ His frontispiece, however, depicts Perseus attacking the Kraken with the Gorgon’s head, a sufficiently colorful metaphor.

⁴⁸⁰ Bowles, *Hobbes and His Critics*, pg. 33, 32.

300+ pages of scrutiny and criticism. Clarendon is an opponent, although he does not dislike everything Hobbes writes. Clarendon's main line of criticism, which need not concern us here in any depth, is that the entire work is "a sly address to *Cromwell*, that...he might by his return submit to his Government" (Survey, 317).⁴⁸¹ Clarendon further critiques Hobbes' theory of sovereignty as both betrayal to the Royalist cause and an absolutism to rival "The Great Turk".

I will reluctantly restrict my analysis to selected portions of Clarendon's analysis, focused on religion. I cannot hope to cover all of the specific issues Clarendon identifies, so I hope to indicate a few of the more intriguing ones here.

In his survey of Chapter 32–4, Clarendon warns us that the "advice of all Divines is positively protected against" and that the reader should expect to be shocked (Survey, 195). Hobbes' criteria for a prophet ensures, "*Moses* was no true Prophet" (Survey, 196). This is because "Mr. *Hobbes* is much concern'd to weaken the credit of Prophets, and of all who succeed in the places" (Survey, 197). Clarendon expresses dismay how Hobbes denies the authorship of the Pentateuch to Moses, "which the Christian world generally believed to be written by him" (Ibid.). Hobbes, "found it necessary to lessen the reverence that was accustom'd to be paid to the Scriptures themselves and the Authority thereof...in order to allow them no other Authority, but what they receive from the Declaration of the King; so that in every Kingdom, there may be several, and contrary Books of Scripture" (Survey, 197–8). Bramhall had similar feelings.

⁴⁸¹ This is of course untrue. Cromwell was not Lord Protector when *Leviathan* was published in 1651. See Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan*, pg. 13. Clarendon's frustration on this front does seem genuine.

Hobbes lacks the gravity to address the Scriptures, and reads them in a “light and comical” manner (Survey, 199). He finds in their meaning “a different sense from what those Fathers, all other men but himself, have understood them to signify.” (Ibid.). He has “traduced the whole Scheme of Christianity in Burlesque” and has subjected the mysteries of religion “to a Philosophical and Mathematical inquisition” (Survey, 200).

Hobbes attempts “to pervert the current sense, and interpretation of some Texts in Scripture to his own purpose, and to wrest and torture words to comply with is extravagant Wit and Logic.” (Survey, 287). Time and again Clarendon highlights the (1) striking and outlandish novelty of Hobbes’ interpretation, (2) how he twists the meaning of Scripture, (3) how he is not a trained theologian, and (4) how he is presumptuous and disrespectful to the texts.⁴⁸²

In sum, Hobbes attitude toward reading the Scriptures, is

Without any other authority then of his own ungovern’d fancy, which can only amuse men with the novelty into impertinent enquiries, or *dispose them to believe, that he hath not that reverence to the Scripture, or adoration of the Author of it*, that would become him to have.” (Survey, 202, emphasis mine).

While Clarendon does not come out and just say it, he certainly seems inclined to think Hobbes is not a believer. His tone, his “impertinent inquiries”, his “torturing so many Texts of Scripture” (Survey, 205) undermine the respect due to the Scripture and to the Prophets. It is natural to assume Hobbes did not have a deep faith in either of those sources of authority. (The same is true of his account of miracles, “it may be some men may imagine, that he hath a mind to lessen the faith of the greatest Miracles which have been wrought” [Survey, 214], again insinuating a darker purpose to Hobbes’ arguments).

⁴⁸² See also Survey, 316.

Clarendon sees a similar attack on Christian values in Hobbes's discussion of heaven and hell, "two Pillars for the support of Religion" (Survey, 219). He notes "it may appear very wonderful and no less scandalous to dis-passioned men, that after sixteen hundred Years, Mr. *Hobbes* should arise a new Evangelist, to make the joies of Heaven more indifferent, and the pains of Hell less formidable, then every any Christian hath before attempted to do" (Survey, 219).

It is not the reign of Christ on Earth which upset Clarendon, as some "Learned Men" have thought that way. But, "he seems much pleased with the mortality of the whole human Nature...From whence he seems to conclude (if his very words do not make it plain) *that the soul as well as the body is buried in the grave, at least until the resurrection.*" (Survey, 221).

Clarendon is appalled at Hobbes' mortalism and his redescription of heaven and hell. "This monstrous liberty and license in forming a new faith for himself...may make men wonder why he is so severe against Atheists, whom he will not allow to be *subjects in the Kingdom of God*" (Survey, 221–2). Hobbes deflates the horror of damnation by making the suffering earthly and finite. For the reprobate, "he hath done them the favor to inform them of the worst that they can signifie, and above all, for their comfort hath brought the place and situation of it to be upon the Earth, which is so well known to them, that they need have no other apprehensions of it then they find reason for." (Survey, 226). This can only encourage licentious and wicked behavior.

By raising Hell, he also lowering heaven. Hobbes, "is as solicitous to undeceive men on the high estimate they have made of the joies of Heaven" (Survey, 227). In heaven, "we shall never want, nor be sick, nor die again, which is a very, which is a very vile expression of

the joies of life eternal.” (Survey, 229). So Hobbes has softened the punishment and diluted the reward for Christian virtue. In other words, he has upset the whole economy of Christian behavior. It is no great leap of the mind to imagine that he seeks to eliminate the concepts of heaven and hell altogether, and with them traditional models of moral behavior. This goes hand in hand with the insinuation of atheism above.

When Clarendon considers Hobbes’ discussion of Jesus in Chapter 41, he is driven to ask him to “forgive those, who *too reasonably suspect*, that his design is...to perplex and disturb, and seduce men, then to enlighten and inform them; and that he assigns the errors in every Chapter to do as much mischief as they can, and retracts none of them, least the confessing himself to be once deceiv’d, may lessen his power to deceive any more.” (Survey, 244–5, emphasis mine). This is a familiar charge. But this is coming from the same Clarendon who supported a Bill to have Hobbes investigated for heresy, which occasioned him to burn some of his papers, as Aubrey tells us.

Hobbes is guilty of “bare-fac’d denying the Trinity...which he makes no Mystery at all, and to contain as man Persons as any Body will assign to it” (Survey, 246). Clarendon makes similar work of the passages about Naaman and idolatry that Bramhall fixated upon.⁴⁸³

At the very end of Chapter 43, which also closes Part III of *Leviathan*, Hobbes tells us how he has read the Scriptures, in a passage that can clearly be examined between the lines:

And in the allegation of Scripture I have endeavored to avoid such texts as are of obscure of controverted interpretation, and to allege none but in such sense as is most plain and

⁴⁸³ See the Survey of Chapter 42, pgs. 246–277 (although the pagination is corrupted twice in the original).

agreeable to the harmony and scope of the whole Bible, which was written for the re-establishment of the kingdom of God in Christ. For it is not by the bare words, but the scope of the writer by which any writing is to be interpreted; and they that insist upon single texts, without considering the main design, can derive nothing from them clearly, but rather by casting atoms of Scripture, as dust before men's eyes, make everything more obscure than it is—an ordinary artifice of those that seek not the truth, but their own advantage. (L43.24/410)⁴⁸⁴

Clarendon observes “I wish with all my heart that Mr. Hobbes did remember, *or believe* his own good rule in the end of this Chapter [43, above], which would have preserved him from many presumptions, which administer great trouble and grief to his Readers for his sake.” (Survey, 279, emphasis mine). Clarendon asserts that Hobbes did not follow the rule as literally stated, that he does cast “Atoms of Scripture” about in “this maze and labyrinth of confusion” (Survey, 282), and that he likely did not believe the rule to be valid in the first place. Hobbes would then be guilty of seeking his own advantage, and avoiding the truth (or most likely, a sound or charitable interpretation of the text).

Clarendon concludes, with obvious restraint, “I have never read any Book that contains in it so much Sedition, Treason, and Impiety as this *Leviathan*; and therefore it is very unfit to be read, taught, or sold, as dissolving all the ligaments of Government, and undermining all Principles of Religion.” (Survey, 319).

Perez Zagorin claims, “Despite the subversive religious ideas he attributed to Hobbes, Clarendon at least never accused the philosopher, as did of his contemporary critics, of atheism.”⁴⁸⁵ I would amend this statement to say he never *directly* accused him, I think the text insinuates it fairly enough.

⁴⁸⁴ This passage forms the basis and provides the title for James Farr’s article “Atomes of Scripture”.

⁴⁸⁵ Zagorin, “Clarendon and Hobbes”, pg. 615.

What is noteworthy, though, is that Clarendon does not accuse Hobbes' of having an immoral character, aspersions to his arrogance aside. If Hobbes has atheist tendencies, he does not display them in the practice of vice. Aubrey highlights this aspect of Hobbes' biography as proof of his piety.

In the final analysis, Clarendon sees through to Hobbes' intentions. He clearly grasps the implications for morality, Church, and faith of Hobbes' doctrines in *Leviathan*. He does so by reading between the lines, and teasing out what is too scandalous in Hobbes to be stated literally. Hobbes writes to convert faith to a tool of the sovereign, and to cast doubt upon it for those careful enough to read it. Is it really a surprise that a student of Machiavelli, like Clarendon clearly was, can have these insights?⁴⁸⁶

The Machiavellian Connection

I believe Hobbes read Machiavelli and was influenced in at least one place by his ideas, namely the importance of religion for statecraft.

Machiavelli writes in the *Discourses*, that religion is necessary for any society's strength against outside aggressors, "for where there is religion, arms can easily be introduced".⁴⁸⁷ He notes that it has benefits for internal security as well, for "a prudent individual knows many goods that do not have in themselves evident reasons with which one can persuade others.

⁴⁸⁶ See Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli*, pp. 146–154 for Clarendon's connection to Machiavelli. Raab argues that Clarendon's own history is an exercise in Machiavellian reading, and that Clarendon was a perceptive reader of Machiavelli.

⁴⁸⁷ Machiavelli, Niccolò. *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. The citation is from Book I, Chapter 11, Paragraph 1, page 35, hereafter cited as (Dis. I.11.1/35)

Thus wise men who wish to take away this difficulty have recourse to God.” (Dis. I.11.3/35)

Machiavelli cites the example of Numa Pompilius as exemplary for this practice.

Later he observes,

princes of a republic or a kingdom should maintain the foundations of the religion they hold; and if this is done, it will be an easy thing for them to maintain their republic religious and, in consequence, good and united. All things that arise in favor of that religion they should favor and magnify, *even though they judge them false*; and they should do it so much the more as they are more prudent and more knowing of natural things. Because this mode has been observed by wise men, *the belief has arisen in miracles, which are celebrated even in false religions; for the prudent enlarge upon them from whatever beginning they arise and their authority then gives them credit with anyone whatever*. (Dis. I.12.1/37. Emphasis mine)

Religion secures social unity and order, whether or not those religious beliefs are true or not. A prudent ruler exploits this to his advantage.

As is his style, Machiavelli cites historical examples where religiously-based deception proved very useful to rulers. “Whoever considers well the Roman histories sees how much religion served to command armies, to animate the plebs, to keep men good, to bring shame to the wicked.” (Dis. I.11.2/34). Religion is thus indispensable for modern rule.

The Prince echoes these sentiments, arguing that a good ruler must “appear all mercy, all faith, all honesty, all humanity, all *religion*. And nothing is more necessary to appear to have than the last quality,” but that he “cannot *observe* all those things for which men are held good” and must “know how to enter into evil when forced by necessity.”⁴⁸⁸ Reasons of state⁴⁸⁹ precede and trump religious considerations. The field of politics is distinct from religious control according to Machiavelli—Christian morality does not and cannot apply.

⁴⁸⁸ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey Mansfield, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985. Book 18, pg. 70, emphasis mine. Hereafter, (Pr. Chapter/Page)

⁴⁸⁹ The term was coined by Machiavelli’s contemporary and critic, Guicciardini.

So, for Machiavelli, religion is important for a ruler, and it functions as a smokescreen for his secular, often wicked, motives. “Religion is to be maintained and the founders of religions honored, because religion is the prime means by which the stability of a state is preserved, its power increased, and the designs of its leaders fulfilled. In other words, religion was important simply as the most potent weapon in the statesman’s armory.”⁴⁹⁰

Machiavelli had a low opinion of Christianity, and thought it had weakened his contemporaries, made them vulnerable and compliant:

Our religion has gloried humble and contemplative more than active men. It has then placed the highest good in humility, abjectness, and contempt of things human; the other [Roman paganism] placed it in greatness of spirit, strength of body, and all other things capable of making men very strong. And if our religion asks that you have strength in yourself, it wishes you to be capable more of suffering than of doing something strong. This mode of life seems to have rendered the world weak and given it in prey to criminal men, who can manage it securely, seeing that the collectivity of men, so as to go to paradise, think more of enduring their beatings than of avenging them. (Dis. II.2.2/131)

He also seemed to have little regard for any external powers. He notes that “many have held and hold the opinion that worldly things are so governed by fortune and by God, that men cannot correct them with their prudence, indeed that they have no remedy at all” (Pr. 25/98). Yet Machiavelli believes “it is better to be impetuous than cautious, because fortune is a woman; and it is necessary, if one wants to hold her down, to beat her and strike her down.” (Pr. 25/101)

Machiavelli also can be seen to have a grim view of human nature, arguing “truly it as very natural and ordinary thing to desire to acquire, and always, when men do it who can they will be praised or not blamed; but when they cannot, and wish to do it anyway, here lie the error and the blame.” (Pr. 3/14–15). He asserts that “men are wicked” (Pr. 17/66–67).

⁴⁹⁰ Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli*, pg. 87.

He claims that it is fair to break faith with one's enemies, writing, "if all men were good, this teaching would not be good; but because they are wicked and do not observe faith with you, you also do not have to observe it with them." (Pr. 18/69). Men cannot, in fact, display any of the virtues, "since human conditions do not permit it." (Pr. 15/62). Moreover, "if one considers everything well, one will find something appears to be virtue, which if pursued would be one's ruin, and something else appears to be vice, which if pursued results in one's security and well-being." (Pr., *ibid.*).

It is easy to see how Machiavelli was taken for an atheist. His contempt for Christian virtues and his refusal to submit to Providence, were clear signs of his personal irreligion.

The Englishmen of Hobbes' era were well aware of the figure of Niccolò Machiavelli; the educated classes were familiar with his writings. Machiavelli was associated with a state "policy" divorced from religion considerations of any sort, or what was worse, he was associated with "politick religion", the principle of religion as a political device."⁴⁹¹ To be called a "Machiavellian" meant to be an atheist or a immoral, cynical politician, although sometimes it was just an ordinary term of abuse.

Machiavelli was so widely reviled he was even a popular villain in the theater of the Elizabethan age and later.⁴⁹² That role was later replaced by the follower of Hobbes' principles, the "Hobbist". "The Hobbist was a stage villain, his ideas a blend of ill-digested

⁴⁹¹ Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli*, pg. 90.

⁴⁹² Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli*, pg. 77.

Machiavellian and Hobbesian principles.”⁴⁹³ This substitution speaks to the real connection, however ill-understood, between the two thinkers in the minds of Hobbes’ contemporaries.

There is little reason to doubt that Hobbes was acquainted with Machiavelli either. Hobbes had been to Italy in the 1630’s and had acquainted himself with Italian thought of the time.⁴⁹⁴ He had the requisite language skills. Hobbes knew French, Latin, and Italian, so he could have read Machiavelli in any of those languages. More directly, a popular English translation of Machiavelli’s *Discourses* and *The Prince* appeared by Edward Dacres, in 1636 and 1640 respectively.⁴⁹⁵ Just because Hobbes never cites Machiavelli does not mean he did not know him well. Hobbes barely cited anyone. But there are echoes of Machiavelli in places.⁴⁹⁶

We should be clear, however. Hobbes was not a mere disciple of Machiavelli. Hobbes had plenty of grounds to disagree with notorious Florentine. Machiavelli was most likely a republican, Hobbes an absolute monarchist. Machiavelli was a great admirer of the Ancients and their city states, Hobbes saw them as outdated and rebellious. Machiavelli turned to history and experience for his insights, Hobbes claimed to work from first principles and to hold “mere prudence” in disdain.⁴⁹⁷ Hobbes does not seem to have valorized ancient virtue much either, his is a philosophy of shirking self-preservation. Nor is he confident that fortune can be thwarted—in fact his determinism eliminates arbitrary

⁴⁹³ Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan*, pg. 139.

⁴⁹⁴ Tuck, *Hobbes: A Very Short Introduction*, pg. 5, see also 4–8.

⁴⁹⁵ See Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli*, pg. 96, 182.

⁴⁹⁶ See *Ibid.*, pg. 194.

⁴⁹⁷ See Raab’s summary, *The English Face of Machiavelli*, pp. 188–200. Hobbes’ relationship to historical knowledge is complicated, however. Hobbes translated Thucydides and greatly admired his work. Hobbes in his adulthood wrote histories, not just of the revolution (*Behemoth, or the Long Parliament*) but also of the law of heresy, and a verse version of Church History. It seems to be the case for Hobbes’ thought that “philosophy is more powerful than history as a mode of inquiry, that philosophy has more explanatory power than history.” (D. Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, pg. 21).

chance, at least from an objective perspective. Hobbes writes for a wide, literate audience, which includes the bourgeoisie; Machiavelli for an elite.

The men differ in character and experience. Machiavelli was a high-level political advisor, and skilled enough in military matters to write an influential treatise on the subject.⁴⁹⁸ Hobbes' critics routinely attacked his "real world" credentials and excessive abstraction. Clarendon writes that "I should be very glad that Mr. *Hobbes* might have a place in Parliament, and sit in Counsel, and be present in Courts of Justice, and other Tribunals, whereby it is probable he would find, that his solitary cogitation, how deep soever, and his too peremptory adhering to some Philosophical Notions, and even Rules of Geometry, had misled him in the investigation of Policy" (Survey, 322).

Machiavelli views the proper role of religion as essential to making a nation strong enough to go to war, as well as for domestic tranquility. Hobbes regards the bellicose uses of religion as being a significant problem, and seeks to reinterpret religion along more pacific lines as a tool for the sovereign to keep internal order alone.

But Hobbes does agree with Machiavelli on certain points. He has a similar view of human nature: men are greedy and a large part tend toward lawlessness. The presence of the latter force even good men to behave in a wicked manner. Hobbes notes that

because there be some that taking pleasure in contemplating their own power in the acts of conquest, which they pursue farther than their security requires, if other (that otherwise would be glad to be at ease within modest bounds) should not by invasion increase their power, they would not be able, long time, by standing only on their defense, to subsist. (L13.4/75).

Machiavelli thinks similarly about politics.

⁴⁹⁸ *Dell'arte della Guerra*, 1521. Translated into English as the *Arte of Warre*, in 1560 by Peter Whitehorne.

Curley argues that “both Machiavelli and Hobbes teach a doctrine fundamentally incompatible with Christian ethics, and that it is, therefore, a mistake to regard them as Christians.”⁴⁹⁹ By this he intends their shared anticlericalism and their moral teaching, as well as their instrumentalism of religion for the state.

Incidentally, but not entirely trivial, is the fact that Hobbes uses the phrase, force or fraud (in Italian, *forzare o fraude*), to describe the virtues of the state of nature, a pairing that recurs throughout *The Prince*.

Most importantly, Hobbes agrees with Machiavelli that religion is something that is necessary for the existence of the state, and that the state must play a role in orienting religious dogma to its interests.

Hobbes notes the apparent contrast between those who use religion for their personal glory (the pagans) and those who received knowledge directly from the Christian God and sought to instruct society with this information. Hobbes notes that,

both sorts have done it with a purpose to make those men that relied on them more apt to obedience, laws, peace, charity, and civil society. So that the religion of the former sort is a part of human politics, and teacheth part of the duty which earthly kings require of their subjects. And the religion of the latter sort is divine politics, and containeth precepts to those that have yielded themselves subjects in the kingdom of God. (L12.12/67)⁵⁰⁰

The passage is striking, because even if we understand Hobbes to be writing as a sincere Christian, he sees one of the fundamental goals of religion to render the people docile to rule. I think that this passage, however, is another example of what Curley would call “suggestion by disavowal”. Hobbes will not go so far as to call Christianity a religion

⁴⁹⁹ Curley, “Religion and Morality in Hobbes”, pg. 99.

⁵⁰⁰ The phrase “divine politics” found its way into FC Hood’s famous book, *The Divine Politics of Thomas Hobbes*.

like any other, but he will put it so close to pagan religion that we are sure to see the comparison. (Much of Chapter 12 contains just this sort of analysis).

Hobbes, like Machiavelli, uses examples from history to show “the religion of the Gentiles was part of their policy.” (L12.21/70). We can see a connection almost identical to Machiavelli’s ideas expressed in the *Discourses* when we examine the analysis of pagan religion in Chapter 12 of *Leviathan*. Hobbes notes

the first founders and legislators of commonwealths among the Gentiles, whose ends were only to keep the people in obedience and peace, have in all places taken care: first, to imprint in the minds a belief that those precepts which they gave concerning religion might not be thought to proceed from their own device, but from the dictates of some god or other spirit (L12.20/69).

Hobbes *cites the very same example of Numa Pompilius and the nymph from Livy that Machiavelli does* in *Discourses* I.11 to make his point. Hobbes notes that pagan leaders “had a care to make it believed that the same things were displeasing to the gods which were forbidden by the laws.” (L12.20.70). Thus, “the common people in their misfortunes, laying the fault on neglect or error in their ceremonies, or on their own disobedience to the laws, were less apt to mutiny against their governors.” (L12.21/70). From here, Hobbes quickly and quietly segues to Christian religion, arguing that God himself gave laws. The beneficial association, expressed in admiring words, between politics and religion in Ancient World seems to be more than mere comparison, it seems to be an *endorsement* by Hobbes.

We have seen that at every juncture, Hobbes chose theological positions that maximized the control of the sovereign, adopting what were clearly idiosyncratic positions while keeping to the pretense of religion. Such an instrumental attitude at the bare minimum requires an ironic distance from the Christian faith, and a willingness to jettison all but a few,

minimal beliefs. Hobbes is certainly not a “Machiavellian”, but he probably picked up this idea of civil religion from Machiavelli. Machiavelli was the innovator of this idea, and was also commonly understood as such by intellectuals in Hobbes’ milieu. Hobbes puts it to good effect.

Bramhall rightly claimed that for Hobbes, “Humane and divine politicks, are but politicks.”⁵⁰¹ This of course is the same criticism leveled against Machiavelli by his critics. Strauss concurs, “Hobbes’s personal attitude to positive religion was at all times the same: religion must serve the State and is to be esteemed or despised according to the services or disservices rendered to the State.”⁵⁰² Even Jean-Jacques Rousseau affirms that “Of all the Christian writers, the philosopher Hobbes is the only one who clearly saw the evil” of the separation between civil and ecclesiastical power, “and its remedy, who dared to propose the reunification of the two heads of the eagle and the complete restoration of political unity, without which no state or government will be well constituted.”⁵⁰³

The audiences

Who is supposed to read *Leviathan* and what are they supposed to discover?

Leviathan, on Curley’s account, has more than one intended audience, that it “is intended to be an ambiguous work, to be read by different people in different ways, as all displays of irony are apt to be.”⁵⁰⁴ He offers three examples, a student convinced of certain political conclusions on the basis of the religious argument, a student convinced of the

⁵⁰¹ Bramhall, “The Catching of Leviathan”, pg. 117. The reference to L12.12 (cited above) is fairly clear.

⁵⁰² Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, pg. 74.

⁵⁰³ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *On Social Contract*, Book IV, Chapter 8, pg. 166 in the Norton Edition. The observation is not my own.

⁵⁰⁴ Curley, “I durst not write so boldly”, pg. 590.

political conclusions based on the secular argument, and a censor, who is convinced the work is pious.

Lloyd argues that Hobbes “attempts to *rationalize*, rather than to cast doubt on, or to refute, Christian religion.”⁵⁰⁵ Hobbes “recognized that *his readers* believed Christianity to be true,” and that he “could *never* have hoped to succeed in persuading his audience to *give up* Christianity.”⁵⁰⁶ *Leviathan* serves to show us “*errors* within Christianity rather than to expose some alleged error *of* Christianity.”⁵⁰⁷ Curley remarks that “this supposes more homogeneity in Hobbes’ audience than we are entitled to assume.”⁵⁰⁸

Paul D. Cooke argues that there were three readers of *Leviathan*, only two of which were strictly intended. Cooke argues that Hobbes was guilty of “deliberately disguising” his teaching about Christianity.⁵⁰⁹ One set of readers saw through the disguise and were appalled. Call them, for now Group 0.⁵¹⁰ Obviously, Hobbes did not desire much to be read by these sorts. A second set appreciated his philosophically-minded, “prudently ambiguous but effective demonstration of the questionableness of biblical faith.”⁵¹¹ Call this Group 1. The third set is most important. This last group thought that “Hobbes’s treatment of the Bible actually did not appear to involve a disguise.” This was Hobbes’ target audience says Cooke, “those who were looking to reconcile genuine Christianity with the new findings of

⁵⁰⁵ Lloyd, *Ideals as Interests*, Pg. 272.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., pg. 273.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., pg. 274.

⁵⁰⁸ Curley, “Religion and Morality in Hobbes”, pg. 109.

⁵⁰⁹ Cooke, Paul D. *Hobbes and Christianity: Reassessing the Bible in Leviathan*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996, pg. 17.

⁵¹⁰ Zero both for being nonstarters and for intended nonexistence in a fully Leviathan-ized universe.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

science.”⁵¹² Call this Group 2. *Leviathan* sends a message of radically reformed Christianity to those unable to give it up (Group 2) and winks at those who can see past it (Group 1).

Cooke’s analysis is correct, although I think he is missing one more dimension.

Lastly, and most importantly, there is also an *indirect audience* for *Leviathan*, those uneducated, overworked, or semi-educated citizens who would be told what to do by those who were possessed of education and authority. Call this Group 3. The religious doctrines were especially important for these people in Hobbes’ mind. These were the most vulnerable to superstition and abuse by the ambitious few.

Teaching the correct doctrines is critical. Hobbes tells us that his principles of government “have the rather need to be diligently and truly taught, *because they cannot be maintained by any civil law or terror of legal punishment.*” (L30.4/220, emphasis mine).⁵¹³ Elsewhere he expresses his belief “that men’s disagreements about opinions and intellectual excellence cannot be eliminated by arms.” (L47.29/488 [OL]).

But Hobbes observes that “the common people’s minds, unless they be tainted with dependence on the potent, or scribbled over with the opinions of their doctors, are like clean paper, fit to receive whatsoever by public authority shall be imprinted in them.” (L30.6/221).

Hobbes argues on this basis:

They whom necessity or covetousness keepeth on their trades and labor, and they, on the other side, whom superfluity or sloth carrieth after their sensual pleasures (which two sorts of men take up the greatest part of mankind), being diverted from the deep meditation which the learning of truth, not only in the matter of natural justice, but also of all other sciences necessarily require, receive the notions of their duty chiefly from divines in the pulpit, and partly from such of their neighbors or familiar acquaintance, as having the faculty

⁵¹² Ibid., pg. 18.

⁵¹³ Lloyd makes much of this passage in *Ideals as Interests*. Fear of violent death is not, and cannot be, the only motivator in the commonwealth.

of discoursing regularly and plausibly seem wiser, and better learned in cases of law and conscience than themselves. And the divines, and such others as make show of learning, derive their knowledge from the universities and from the schools of law, or from the books which men eminent in those schools and universities have been published. It is, therefore, manifest that the instruction of the people dependeth wholly on the right teaching of youth in the university. (L30.14/225).

The educational system is the bottleneck for the control of society, and *Leviathan* is designed to be its chief textbook. Hobbes announces this at the close of Part II, at the end of Part IV in the Latin *Leviathan*, and in the Review And Conclusion (See L31.41/243–4, L47[OL]/488, and R&C.16/496).

So we might say the elites in Group 1 choose *Leviathan* to be the textbook for Group 2 who in turn educate Group 3. These three have a pyramidal relationship. Group 0 would, as its name implies, shrink to nothing.

Conclusion

The interesting thing about the contemporary advocates for Hobbes' sincere profession of Christianity is that they make valid points. The defenders of the Hobbes-as-atheist position do need to address these objections. The kind of brutal passage-to-passage fighting that this engenders may be messy, but it is important. Sometimes the ironist pushes too far. The tide turned briefly against the skeptics, but it seems to be flowing back in its traditional direction once more. The sincerity-advocates win several battles, but they seem to have lost the war.

Hobbes is a master stylist and a thoroughgoing student of theology, orthodox and otherwise. The presence of so much religious argumentation in Hobbes' masterpiece is a testament to his ability to discover and implement reconciliation between his science and his political theory and amenable religious doctrines. Only a genius like Hobbes could combined

Calvin and Overton and Archer and make us wonder as to his intentions to this day. Ultimately, it was not sincere theology.

So it is fair to say that the kneejerk reaction, “Hobbes is an atheist” is correct, but usually for the wrong reasons. Hobbes does not have two feet firmly planted in the scientific age. His was a different time with different assumptions and prejudices. He had to signal his skepticism covertly, although perhaps not covertly enough. Hobbes had many flaws, among them an overflowing literary style which could be a little too transparent. But Hobbes wrote *Leviathan* under unique conditions, and its “honesty” has given us much to reflect upon and grapple with.

Hobbes’ deepest heresy was his reduction of religion to a department of government. But Hobbes’ argument in *Leviathan* works on two, related levels. The superficial level was to square Christianity with materialist, determinist science and absolutist political theory. This would move Christians toward a more rational, orderly religion. The deeper level was where Hobbes engenders doubt about Christianity in general, and seeks to exploit it for the aims of the state in general. And by teaching the teachers the first level, perhaps he was setting them up for the next level, but most likely he thought that he could not escape “This perpetual fear, always accompanying mankind in their ignorance of causes (as it were in the dark)” (L12.6/64) which is the seed of religion, and thus must be domesticated by a religion that is at home with science and most importantly, with unwavering political stability and power.

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